

Israel reveals it has been holding alleged Iraq spy for eight years

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli authorities revealed Monday that they have been holding an Arab Israeli for eight years on charges of spying for Iraq.

The supreme court authorised release of information concerning the case of Munir Fathi Said in a ruling which overturned a lower court decision to release the prisoner from the remainder of his 13-year jail term.

Mr. Said was convicted in 1990 of espionage by a court in the northern city of Nazareth and was sentenced to 13 years in prison, according to a statement released by the supreme court.

According to the charges against him, Mr. Said provided Iraq between 1981 and 1988 with photographs of classified Israeli military installations, including the Dimona nuclear facility suspected of producing Israel's nuclear weapons arsenal, and of oil depots in the port city of Haifa.

Israel releases Lebanese man after two years in captivity

TYRE (AFP) — A Lebanese man, seized by Israel two years ago, was released Monday after an Israeli court found him innocent of conducting anti-Israeli attacks, Red Cross sources said.

The Israeli army handed over a handcuffed and blindfolded Ali Ahmad Banjak, 22, to Barbara Hinerman, the International Committee of the Red Cross's delegate in the town of Naqoura in the south Lebanon, the sources said.

The Red Cross took Mr. Banjak to the southern port city of Tyre where he was interrogated by the Lebanese army. He then headed home to the nearby village of Shehaytiye, they said.

Israel refuses entry to musician for Nakba celebrations

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israeli authorities have prevented a Palestinian musician from entering the country to play at Palestinian celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the "Nakba," or Catastrophe, the organisers said Monday.

Marwan Abbadi, a Palestinian carrying an Austrian passport, has been held at Ben Gurion airport outside Tel Aviv since his arrival from Austria Sunday night, said Rania Ilyas, head of one of the groups which invited Mr. Abbadi.

"Israeli officials informed us that the interior ministry gave orders that Abbadi is to be barred from entering Israel for unknown security reasons," said Ms. Ilyas, head of the Arab east Jerusalem-based cultural group Yabus.

"They have said they will return him to Austria tonight, despite requests by the Austrian embassy that he be allowed entry," she told AFP.

Mr. Abbadi had been invited to give a series of performances in a "Song for Freedom" programme marking the 50th anniversary of the 1948 war which surrounded the creation of Israel, known by Palestinians as Al Nakba.

He was due to perform in Arab east Jerusalem, the West Bank towns of Bethlehem and Ramallah, and the northern Israeli town of Nazareth, Ms. Ilyas said.

Israeli authorities were not available for comment on Mr. Abbadi's case.

"The interior ministry's statements are lies and an attempt to prevent freedom of expression," Mr. Abbadi entered Israel last year for several performances and there was no talk of security problems," Ms. Ilyas said.

Mohammad Yaqub, of the Palestinian National Institute for Music, another organiser of the "Songs for Freedom" programme, called the refusal to allow Mr. Abbadi entry "a racist decision."

"They aim to ruin any Palestinian activities which recall what happened 50 years ago in the Nakba," he said.



Palestinian students at Hebron University, clad in the traditional chequered kofia (scarf), burn the American and Israeli flags Monday during a ceremony in the West Bank town of Hebron to mark the 50th anniversary of 'Al Nakba,' Arabic for 'Catastrophe,' a term Palestinians and Arabs use for the date of the creation of the state of Israel (AFP photo)

Palestinian protesters burn mock Jewish settlement in march

HEBRON (AFP) — Palestinian university students blew up a model of a Jewish settlement during a demonstration here on Monday to mark the 50th anniversary of the "Nakba," or Catastrophe, witnesses said.

Several dozen students marched through Hebron University, while a group of students masked in keffiyeh scarves burned a cardboard model of a settlement, then burned Israeli and American flags, witnesses said.

The youth branch of Yasser Arafat's Fateh faction of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), as well as opposition factions, participated in the demonstration, called to mark the 50th anniversary of the "Nakba," as Palestinians call the 1948 war which surrounded the creation of Israel.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank town of Nablus, some 2,000 children participated in a march in the Balata refugee camp, demanding the right of return for refugees in the occupied territories and neighbouring Arab countries.

Three masked men led the march, firing Kalashnikovs in the air, witnesses said.

"This march is a message of anger to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to remind him that all our options are open," said Tayssir Nassuralah, the top official for refugees in Nablus, in a speech to the crowd.

The Committee for the Protection of Refugees' Rights, which called the march, distributed a statement demanding that Palestinian National Authority "call a halt to negotiations and security cooperation with Israel."

The authority "must assure the right of refugees to return by declaring the creation of a Palestinian state," the statement said.

The fate of the 3.5 million Palestinian refugees in the region is supposed to be determined in negotiations for a final peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.

Iran, Iraq launch joint search for remains of dead soldiers

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran and Iraq began a joint search Monday for the remains of soldiers killed close to their common border during their 1980-1988 war, Iran's state radio announced.

Ten Iranian military officers, equipped with heavy instruments, searched just inside Iraq in a first survey, the radio said.

An Iraqi team is expected here shortly for similar searches in Iranian territory, the radio said.

It described the cooperation as "very important" in determining the fate of those listed as missing-in-action (MIA) in the eight-year conflict.

Another Iranian team conducted a search Monday along the border river of Arvandrud (Shatt Al Arab), according to the radio report.

The question of prisoners of war (PoWs) and the MIA was long a stumbling bloc to improved ties between the two neighbours.

But the two countries have reached a settlement and been moving quickly in resolving both issues. They exchanged large numbers of PoWs in the past weeks and are to exchange more on May 15 to permanently close the PoWs file.

The remains of 39,230 Iranian soldiers have been found since the end of the war, which killed around 300,000 Iranians and left another 500,000 wounded, most of them as invalids.

Dozens of members of Iranian search teams have been killed in mine explosions during search operations for missing soldiers.

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Japanese chief of staff visits Israel

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The chief of Japan's army, General Yuji Fujinawa, held talks with Israel's Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai Monday on Middle East peace efforts and weapons from weapons of mass destruction in the region, the Israeli defence ministry said.

Mr. Mordechai also expressed Israel's interest in resuming peace talks with Syria after a break of more than two years, it said.

The two men also discussed "the threat of missiles and chemical and biological weapons" development in the region, it said. Israel has accused both Syria and Iran of developing non-conventional weapons and missiles capable of delivering them to the Jewish state.

Gen. Fujinawa was scheduled to meet Tuesday with his Israeli counterpart, General Amnon Shahab, and to visit the headquarters of Israel's northern command before leaving on Wednesday, the army said.

Three dead, 20 injured in attack on train south of Algiers

ALGIERS (AP) — Three travellers were killed and 20 injured in a bomb attack on a train south of Algiers, hospital workers said Monday.

The official death toll in Sunday's attack was two. The attackers were not identified, though Islamists were suspected.

The attack took place near Boufarik, 35 kilometres south of the capital. The hospital officials, speaking on customary anonymity, said two of the injured were in serious condition.

The violence near Algiers came a day after a bomb exploded near a Turkish bathhouse in a working-class neighbourhood, injuring as many as 30 people and breaking a two-month lull in attacks on the capital.

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FM apologises for Croatia's World War II persecution of Jews

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Croatian Foreign Minister Mate Granic issued an emotional apology Monday for the persecution of Jews under his country's pro-Nazi Ustashi regime during World War II.

"Relying on its freedom-loving and anti-Fascist roots, the modern democratic Croatia in the strongest possible terms condemns Fascism, racial hatred, xenophobia and anti-Semitism," Mr. Granic said during a visit to the Yad Vashem memorial to the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust.

"I express and testify to the deepest regret and condemnation of the persecution, suffering and the tragedy of the Jews on Croatian territory under the Ustashi regime," said Mr. Granic, who is also deputy prime minister.

Mr. Granic arrived late Sunday for the highest level visit to Israel by a Croatian official since the two nations established diplomatic relations in September.

He was due to meet later Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and sign a series of cooperation agreements on civil aviation and tourism.

Israel refused to recognise Croatia when it gained independence from Belgrade in 1991 because of a book by Croatian President Franjo Tudjman which played down the role of the Ustashi regime in the extermination of tens of thousands of Jews.

It finally established ties after Mr. Tudjman published an excised English translation of his book and his government issued a statement apologising for the crimes of the Fascist regime.

Mr. Granic returned to the theme during his visit to the Yad Vashem memorial and museum, saying the facility was "an eternal warning that such crimes must not happen again."

"Here the memory is kept of all those who risked and gave their lives to save their Jewish brothers and mankind against the atrocity of Nazi madness," he said.

"On behalf of the government of Croatia and with deepest respect for the victims of the Holocaust, I express eternal condemnation of the crime of genocide of six million Jews," he said.

"They aim to ruin any Palestinian activities which recall what happened 50 years ago in the Nakba," he said.

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Lebanese PM's meeting with Annan cancelled — PM's office

BEIRUT (AFP) — Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's planned meeting with U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan in France Monday will not take place, the Lebanese prime minister's office said. No reason was given for the cancellation of the meeting, which was announced Sunday, the same day that Mr. Hariri held talks with French President Jacques Chirac.

NEWS IN BRIEF

blame developments in the region and the need to keep an eye on the Palestinian-Israeli situation and its repercussions on Lebanon," Al Nahar said.

BEIRUT (AFP) — Russian Middle East Peace Envoy Victor Posavlyuk is due in Beirut this week to discuss a recent Israeli offer for a conditional troop withdrawal from south Lebanon, the Russian ambassador here said Monday. Russian Ambassador Oleg Peressypkin, after a meeting with the secretary general of the Lebanese foreign ministry, said Mr. Posavlyuk will hold talks with Lebanese Foreign Minister

blame developments in the region and the need to keep an eye on the Palestinian-Israeli situation and its repercussions on Lebanon," Al Nahar said.

Nearly 100 PKK rebels killed by Turkish army in two weeks

ANKARA (AFP) — Ninety-nine Kurdish rebels from the separatist Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) have been killed by Turkish security forces in the past two weeks, officials said Monday.

Nine rebels were wounded and 14 captured during the latest Turkish offensive in the east and south-east of the country, according to security officials quoted by Anatolia news agency.

The PKK has been fighting since 1984 to carve out an independent Kurdish state in Southeast Turkey. More than 29,000 people have died in violence related to the PKK rebellion.

Nine rebels were wounded and 14 captured during the latest Turkish offensive in the east and south-east of the country, according to security officials quoted by Anatolia news agency.

JORDAN TELEVISION

TEL 77311-19
PROGRAMME TWO
15:10Cartoon — Pro Stars
15:30 Small Talk — "Quiz Show"
16:00Drama Bordertown
16:30 Doc. — The Health Show
17:00Route of Capricorn
18:00French Programmes
19:00Le Journal
19:15French Programme
19:30News headlines
19:35 Step by Step — "Three Girls and Baby"
20:10What Would You Do?
20:30Encounter
21:30Drama — Rhodes
22:00News in English
22:30 Feature Film — "The Heart of the Lie"
23:45Metro Cafe

PRAYER TIMES

04:08Fajr
05:46(Sunrise) Duha
12:32Dhuhr
16:12Asr
19:28Maghreb
20:55Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifish, Tel. 5920740

Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811
St. Athanasius Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 771751
Amman International Church Tel. 865897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifish Tel. 5920146
The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic

Church Tel. 771331
The American Orthodox Church Tel. 775261
WEATHER
Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Skies will be partly cloudy with a chance of scattered showers particularly in the northern regions and winds westerly moderate to active. In Aqaba, it will be partly cloudy, winds northerly moderate to active, and seas choppy.
Amman11/21
Aqaba18/28
Deserts08/23
Jordan Valley16/28
Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 24, Aqaba 30 Humidity readings: Amman 28 per cent, Aqaba 35 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
Dr. Fakher Bilbeisi5522233
Dr. Abdul Majid Al Shalal4391405

Dr. Abdul Hadi Tayyem 4620115
Dr. Muntahir Al Qasbi 7795959
Ferdows pharmacy778336
Al Asema pharmacy4637055
Al Salam pharmacy4636730
Yacoub pharmacy4644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 4637660
Nairookh pharmacy4623672
IRBID:
Dr. Mazen Abu Bakir276852
Al Quds pharmacy(—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Mazen Saffarini985832
Khalifeh pharmacy985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue4630341
Civil Defence Emergency199
Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade4617101
Blood Bank775121
Highway Police843402
Traffic Police896390
Public Security Dept.4630321
Hotel Complaints5605800
Price Complaints5661176
Water & Sewerage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Com-

plaints787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)121
Overseas Calls010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs5661101
Jordan Television773111
Radio Jordan774111
Water Authority5680100
J. Electricity Authority315615
Electric Power Co.4636381
RJ Flight Information44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery5921199
The Islamic Abdi5661317
Hussein Medical Centre Tel. 836813, 856836
Luzmils4630195
Khalidi Maternity4644281/6
Akileh Maternity4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362
Mahbas, J. Araman4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani5607071
Shmeisani Hospital5669131
University Hospital5353444
Al-Muasher Hospital 5667227/9

Al-Ahli, Abdali56641646
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir775111/26
Army, Marka891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 5602340/50
Amal Hospital5674155
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital(09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital(09)990999

FOR THE TRAVELLER

ARRIVALS
Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:30Damasus (RJ)
07:45Sanaa (RJ)
10:20Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:25Beirut (RJ)
10:40Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
10:50Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
17:05Cairo (RJ)
18:30Chicago, Amsterdam (RJ)
19:00London, Frankfurt (RJ)
Other Flights
13:00Riyadh (SV)
13:30Aden (YH)
14:25Munich (LH)
15:00Istanbul (TK)
18:05Kiev (GU)
18:30Dubai, Damasus (EK)
19:00Paris (AF)
20:25Tel Aviv (LY)
21:10Beirut (MS)
21:40Cairo (ME)
23:35Lamaca (CY)
23:40Amsterdam (KL)
00:55Bucharest (RO)
03:00Rome (AZ)
04:25London (BC)
Royal Wings (RW) Flights
10:20 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA and proceeding to Marka Airport) (RW)
19:20 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
23:25 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:45Beirut (RJ)
08:50Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
12:30Brussels, London (RJ)
12:35Berlin, Frankfurt (RJ)
13:00Geneva, Madrid (RJ)
13:15Cairo (RJ)
13:40Brussels, Paris (RJ)
21:20Jeddah (RJ)
21:40Damasus (RJ)
22:00Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
Other Flights
07:25Frankfurt (LH)
14:30Riyadh (SV)
14:30Aden (YH)
15:15Munich (LH)
16:00Istanbul (TK)
19:05Kiev (GU)
19:30Dubai, Damasus (EK)
21:10Tel Aviv (LY)
22:40Cairo (MS)
00:40Beirut, Amsterdam (KL)
01:55Bucharest (RO)
04:00Rome (AZ)
Royal Wings (RW) Flights
08:00 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
17:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
21:30Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

Home News

King to open Karameh Dam today

KARAMEH (AP) — King Hussein will formally open the Karameh Dam on the Jordan River today.

The 1951 project, which cost \$45 million, will provide water for irrigation and drinking water for the Jordan Valley.

The dam, which is 45 metres high and 140 metres long, will have a pumping station to pump water from the Jordan River to the valley.

According to a statement by the Jordanian Ministry of Water, the dam will provide water for 100,000 hectares of land.

The dam will also provide water for the Jordan Valley, which is one of the poorest regions in the country.

The King will be accompanied by the Prime Minister and other senior officials.

The ceremony will be held at the Karameh Dam, which is located on the Jordan River, about 100 kilometres north of Amman.

The dam is one of the largest and most important infrastructure projects in Jordan's history.

It will play a vital role in the development of the Jordan Valley and the country as a whole.

Media conference

Media experts from 15 countries will gather in Amman for a media conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The conference, which is organized by the Arab League, will discuss the latest developments in the conflict and the role of the media.

The experts will also discuss the impact of the conflict on the region and the world.

The conference will be held at the Amman International Conference Centre.

It will last for three days, from Monday to Wednesday.

The experts will include journalists, media scholars, and public relations specialists.

The conference is expected to be a fruitful one, with many important decisions being made.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Cabinet accepts Sharaf's retirement

AMMAN (AP) — The Cabinet on Monday accepted the resignation of Sharif Fawaz Sharaf.

Sharaf had been serving as the Minister of Education since 1994.

He will be replaced by a new minister, who will be appointed by the Prime Minister.

Sharaf's resignation was accepted unanimously by the Cabinet.

Sharaf had been in the government for over three years.

During his tenure, he had worked to improve the education system in Jordan.

He had also been involved in many important projects and initiatives.

Sharaf's resignation was a surprise to many, as he was a popular figure in the government.

He will be leaving the government to pursue other interests.

what's going on

AMERICAN ARTS FESTIVAL

Lecture by Nadia Mitlak

Wednesday, May 13, 7:00 pm

The American Cultural Centre in Amman will host a lecture by Nadia Mitlak.

Mitlak is a well-known scholar and writer on the American arts scene.

She will discuss the role of the arts in American society and culture.

The lecture is free of charge and open to the public.

It will be held at the American Cultural Centre, which is located in the heart of Amman.

The centre is a hub for cultural and artistic activities in the city.

It has many facilities and resources for the arts community.

The lecture is a great opportunity for anyone interested in the American arts scene.

Don't miss it!

THE FIRST THEATRE FESTIVAL

The first theatre festival in Amman will be held at the American Cultural Centre.

The festival, which is organized by the American Cultural Centre, will feature a variety of theatrical performances.

The performances will be by both local and international troupes.

The festival is expected to be a great success, with many people attending the performances.

It will provide a great opportunity for the local theatre community to showcase their talents.

It will also provide a great opportunity for the public to enjoy high-quality theatrical performances.

The festival will run for several days, from Monday to Friday.

The performances will be held at the American Cultural Centre, which is a great venue for the arts.

The festival is a must-see event for anyone interested in the arts.

Don't miss it!

PIANO RECITAL

Piano recital by 10-year-old Jordanian pianist Fawaz Sharaf.

Wednesday, May 13, 8:00 pm

The American Cultural Centre in Amman will host a piano recital by 10-year-old Fawaz Sharaf.

Sharaf is a talented pianist who has won many awards and competitions.

He will be performing a variety of classical pieces.

The recital is free of charge and open to the public.

It will be held at the American Cultural Centre, which is a great venue for the arts.

The recital is a great opportunity for anyone interested in classical music.

Don't miss it!

Exit poll gives Estrada lead in the Philippines

MANILA (R) — Millions voted in the Philippines Monday for a new president in one of the world's rowdiest democracies, and an exit poll released just before voting ended suggested a big win for former movie star Joseph Estrada.

Voting was largely peaceful, but polling in one province was marred by gun battles killing at least three people and preventing tens of thousands from casting their ballots, officials said.

Police said the deaths in the province of Lanao del Sur on the southern island of Mindanao brought to 39 the number of people killed in a sometimes bitter election campaign. Police said earlier Monday the toll was 32.

Election officials put the turnout by noon at 65 per cent and forecast an overall 80 per cent, despite searing tropical temperatures of up to 38 Celsius.

At stake were more than 17,000 positions from president and members of congress to provincial governors and councillors.

An exit poll released shortly before polls closed at 3 p.m. (0700 GMT) showed Mr. Estrada far ahead of his nine rivals. Private radio station DZRH conducted the poll.

It said 36.1 per cent of 13,491 people it polled around the country said they voted for Mr. Estrada, more than double the 18 per cent for de Mr. Venecia, his nearest rival.

Actual results of the election are not expected to be known for about two weeks. About 34 million voters are registered and their ballots are counted manually.

A citizens' watchdog designated to carry out an unofficial vote count hopes to tally 90 per cent of the results in 10 days.

The armed forces and police were put on high alert to forestall violence during the polls, which outgoing President Fidel Ramos labelled a test of Philippine democracy. Mr. Ramos is barred by the constitution from a second six-year term.

In Lanao del Sur, two people were killed when followers of rival mayoral candidates staged a gun battle in the centre of Butig town after voting began, said an official of the citizens poll watchdog, the National Movement for Free Election.

We heard fighting is still going on... The volunteer who reported to us by radio was so scared his voice was shaking because he was at

the scene, the group's regional chairman Abdulgani Marohombas told Reuters by telephone.

In nearby Malabang town, another person was shot dead and two people wounded when other armed groups supporting rival mayoral candidates opened fire at each other.

In five towns in the province more than 40,000 voters were unable to vote either because gunmen roamed near polling centres or blocked roads to prevent delivery of ballot boxes.

Mr. Estrada's reputation as a womaniser and drinker has earned him the scorn of the Roman Catholic church, an influential institution in the 85 per cent Catholic country. The business community worries about his lack of an economic background and he has also faced allegations — which he also denies — of links to drug barons.

Mr. de Venecia, voting in the northern city of Dagupan, appealed to voters to follow their conscience.

Do not vote for candidates who are associated with the drug lords and the gambling syndicates, and the agents of corruption and the agents of crime. These are the people who are destroying the fabric of Philippine society, he said.

Mr. Estrada's reputation as a womaniser and drinker has earned him the scorn of the Roman Catholic church, an influential institution in the 85 per cent Catholic country. The business community worries about his lack of an economic background and he has also faced allegations — which he also denies — of links to drug barons.

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Filipino children wear cardboard masks of opposition presidential candidate Joseph Estrada outside a polling station in Manila. An exit poll released towards the end of Monday's Philippine presidential election showed widely favoured Estrada far in front of his nine rivals (Reuters photo)

France accused of concealing N-test medical reports

SUVA (AFP) — Two French Polynesian anti-nuclear campaigners claimed Monday that fellow countrymen are dying from nuclear contamination and nuclear test site workers are denied the right to see their medical reports.

French Polynesian pro-independence activists Ronald Oldham and Edouard Huriore are in Fiji to rally support for a campaign to press France authorities to hand over medical reports to 15,000 people who worked at the Mururoa Atoll test site.

The two also want an independent study of radioactivity on the islands. French authorities vigorously denied their claims Monday.

Mr. Huriore, who worked at Mururoa for nine years to 1988, told reporters he was required to undergo a medical examination every 15 days but was not shown any of his medical reports.

cent of workers underwent medical examination before starting work on the test sites but only 48 per cent were examined after finishing work.

France's ambassador to Fiji, Michel Jolivet, rejected the claims, saying: "This whole thing is really ludicrous at this time."

He said the IAEA was to release its information soon and some people were trying to spread misleading information.

Jolivet said the agency team was "much broader" and "quite independent" including experts from the South Pacific Forum and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme.

lagoon is not contaminated but we were forbidden to eat it.

"Some people stole the fish. I was one of them. I can say the fish is poisoned because after eating it, I got very itchy and really dizzy," he claimed.

"Many of my friends who worked with me in Mururoa are dying while the French are claiming it is safe."

The visit by the pair precedes the expected release next month of a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on radioactivity on Mururoa and Fangataufa atolls.

Anti-Taleban alliance steps up internecine struggle over key city

KABUL (AFP) — Two member factions of Afghanistan's anti-Taleban alliance have stepped up their internal and violent struggle for control of the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, sources told AFP Monday.

According to witnesses, troops loyal to ex-Communist warlord Abdul Rashid Dostam have taken control of all entry points into the city in their ongoing attempt to oust the powerful Shiite Muslim Hezb-i-Wahdat group.

The sources said Dostam's Jumbesh faction — previously the strongest group in the ethnic-Uzbek city — has established a stronghold around the dusty anti-Taleban base in an attempt to drive its rivals out.

"The city is currently quiet but there have been sporadic outbreaks of serious fighting during the last week and the situation is still extremely tense," an independent source said.

Mr. Dostam's troops have been posted at a key junction on the east-bound highway close to the city airport, while fighters backed by heavy armour have been sighted to the south and west.



Tibetan exiles march, urging

Tibetan exiles march, urging

NEW DELHI (AFP) — A group of Tibetan exiles gathered in New Delhi Monday to demand the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Tibet.

The group, which included monks and nuns, held a peaceful demonstration in front of the Indian Parliament building.

The protesters carried banners and sang hymns in Tibetan. They also held a prayer ceremony for the peace of Tibet.

The group was led by a senior Tibetan official who urged the Indian government to take a strong stand against Chinese aggression in Tibet.

Bosnia's armies trained to clear mines they left behind

TRAVNIK, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AFP) — Midhat Skender, 28, puts on a heavy flak-jacket and helmet as he goes out to a mock minefield for training with a mine detector.

It's not a new job for him — he cleared many mines during the Bosnian war — but his gear is "We would go to the minefields in jeans and tennis shoes," he recalled. "We did not have protective equipment."

Skender is one of 28 soldiers in Bosnia's mainly Muslim Federation Army who this month are undergoing a 21-day mine-clearing training programme at one of three centres set up in March and sponsored by the U.S. government.

month, war. They killed or maimed 50 people a month. Up till now mine clearing has been done by various civilian agencies supervised by the United Nations.

The aim is to shift more of the work to Bosnia's three armies, but the soldiers in the field know that their civilian counterparts get better pay and insurance benefits.

"Our main concern is that once these soldiers are trained they will find better-paying jobs with some other organisation," said Major Sejim Jazmin, commander of the unit that is undergoing training in Travnik.

Indian PM intervenes in bid to end nurses strike

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee launched an initiative Monday to end a nurses' strike which has disrupted hospitals and organisers claim is starting to spread outside New Delhi.

The Press Trust of India, quoting official sources, said the premier asked his parliamentary affairs minister, Madan Lal Khurana, to begin talks with nurses to end the week-long strike.

"Talks are in progress to reach an amicable settlement," said a source close to Mr. Khurana, a former Delhi city chief minister who averted a similar nurses' strike three years ago.

Second round crucial after right surges in Hungarian ballots

BUDAPEST (AFP) — The second round of Hungarian elections will be crucial, after a massive surge by the right put them in a position where they could conceivably topple the ruling Socialists, commentators said Tuesday.

Premier Gyula Horn's Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) won the first-round vote Monday with 32.26 per cent of the ballot, but the massive right-wing surge might prevent it from being able to form a government, they warned.

"Uncertainty is so great that it is, unfortunately, almost certain that the next two weeks will be ruled by nervousness," said the largest-circulation Nepszabadsag.



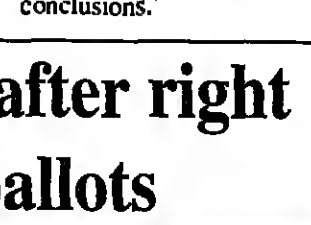
Istvan Csorba, head of the nationalist right-wing Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIEP), talks to journalists (Reuters photo)

The right-wing opposition Federation of Young Democrats-Hungarian Civic Party (Fidesz-MPP) came in second behind the Socialists with 28.20 per cent of the vote Sunday.



president asks the winner of the elections to form a government, but parliament must approve the prime minister. A powerful opposition can thus simply block the creation of a minority government.

Hungary's complicated two-round election system, a mix of direct elections and proportional representation, was supposed to give the broad outlines of the government after the first round, but the final allocation of seats in the 386-seat parliament is only given in the second round.



tally rearranged party structures. The Hungarian electorate created a bipolar system," said Nepszabadsag.

Most papers were concerned after the first time in post-war Hungary, an extreme right party got into parliament. That the Party of Hungarian Life and Justice (MIEP) could get 5.55 per cent of the vote "shows that part of society became more captive to radical nationalist politics," warned Nepszabadsag.

EBRD chiefs for Chernobyl

BRUSSELS (AFP) — The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) leaders met Monday to discuss the bank's role in helping Ukraine rebuild the damaged nuclear reactor.

The bank's chief executive, Paul Cerone, said the EBRD would be "able to provide the necessary financial support to help Ukraine rebuild the reactor."

The bank's board of directors, which includes representatives from 28 member countries, will meet in June to discuss the bank's role in helping Ukraine rebuild the reactor.

Military drills start

TAIPEI (AFP) — Taiwanese military drills started Monday, but officials said they would not display the sea-based missile drills to avoid alarming Beijing.

The drills, which included air, land and sea exercises, were held in the Taiwan Strait, a body of water between the mainland and the island.

The drills were part of a larger military exercise that included the use of live ammunition. The drills were also a response to recent tensions between Taiwan and the mainland.

Arrested British-Australian faces charges in Myanmar

BANGKOK (AFP) — British and Australian diplomats are pushing for better consular access to their dual-citizen detained in Myanmar for allegedly collaborating with an outlawed resistance group, officials said Monday.

The British and Australian embassies are seeking joint consular access and we were in the court this morning," Australian Ambassador to Myanmar Lyndal McLean told AFP by telephone from Yangon (Rangoon).

James Rupert Russell Mawdsley, 25, a citizen of both Britain and Australia, is facing illegal entry charges after being arrested on April 30 near the Thai border, shortly after crossing into Myanmar without a visa or passport.

Sources said Mr. Mawdsley had appeared in a Yangon court Monday but the proceedings were adjourned until Wednesday.

"We have been allowed to meet him so far we have been a bit disappointed with the consular access and we are pushing for longer meetings with him," Mr. McLean said.

Sources said Mr. Mawdsley had complained to embassy officials of being poorly treated while in custody.

The prosecution alleged Mr. Mawdsley had been handing out pamphlets from the Thai-based All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), a democracy group labelled "terrorists" by Myanmar's ruling junta.

Last week a state-run newspaper in Yangon said Mr. Mawdsley was a "mercenary terrorist" who had crossed the border "with the intent to cause disturbances to disrupt stability of the state."

Health authorities have said more than 30,000 patients have been affected by the strike which has affected 32 state-run hospitals.



Tibetans shout anti-Chinese slogans during a protest march outside the United Nations office in New Delhi. More than 100 activists from India and Nepal took part in the protest to show their solidarity with five fellow activists who are on a hunger-strike seeking independence for their homeland under Chinese occupation (Reuters photo)

Tibetan exiles stage protest march, urge U.N. to act

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Around 100 Tibetan exiles marched on the United Nations office here Monday to demand the world body for doing "nothing" to restore their homeland's independence from China.

Monks and nuns joined other exiles in shouting anti-Chinese slogans before handing over several memorandums addressed to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

One statement said that while the U.N. had done a "commendable job in some parts of the world" it had done "nothing, absolutely nothing, substantial to save Tibet."

"It is because China, the perpetrator of Tibet's suffering, is a big nation and member of the U.N. Security Council?" it said, adding: "If the United Nations lets its decisions be influenced by such considerations, the world will lose faith in it."

Another memorandum by a women's group appealed: "Don't let down the suffering people on this earth. The United Nations is supposed to be the conscience of the civilised world. Do something to live up to this image."

A third letter said it was important to back the Tibetan cause for independence as "many people in the world look to Tibetans for guidance and peace."

Tibetan activists have asked the U.N. to "promote a peaceful settlement of the question of Tibet and initiate a U.N.-sponsored

plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the Tibetan people."

They have also called for a "special rapporteur to investigate the situation of human rights in Chinese-occupied Tibet."

Late last month, a Tibetan monk immolated himself in New Delhi in the first suicide protest in India after police broke up a marathon hunger strike by six Tibetans in support of Tibetan independence. Five others have replaced them and were still fasting on Monday.

Chinese troops occupied Tibet in 1951. The Dalai Lama and some 100,000 Tibetans fled to India after Beijing crushed an anti-Chinese uprising in Tibet in 1959.

EBRD chiefs appeal for cash for Chernobyl sarcophagus

KIEV (AFP) — The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) leaders appealed to the international community Monday to urgently find millions of dollars to seal the crumbling sarcophagus encasing the damaged Chernobyl nuclear reactor, in order to avert a fresh disaster.

Charles Frank, acting president of EBRD, said unless a new structure was built to enclose the shattered number four reactor, the consequences for the world would be unimaginable.

Mr. Frank said the Chernobyl Shelter Fund programme managed by the EBRD needed some \$760 million, but only \$400 millions has so far been raised, he said.

"If we fail to raise the necessary funds, the consequences for the world are too horrible to imagine," he warned the annual general meeting of the EBRD's board of governors, which is meeting here.

Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma said his country needed \$120-\$130 billion to tackle the fallout of the April 1986 accident, which sent clouds of radiation over much of Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

The accident, triggered by an explosion in the plant's number four reactor, remains the world's worst civilian nuclear disaster to date.

"Just the direct irreversible losses of Ukraine caused by the Chernobyl disaster amount to \$120 billion to \$130 billion, which exceeds the revenue part of the Ukrainian budget six times," Mr. Kuchma said.

Belgian Finance Minister Philippe Maystadt, the current chairman of the EBRD board of governors, said the Soviet-designed nuclear reactors at Chernobyl and other ex-Soviet bloc states were "probably the most dreadful legacy of the former Communist regimes."

Ukraine has been clamouring for international funds to build a new sarcophagus on top of the existing structure, and finance construction of two nuclear power plants to compensate for the promised closure of the Chernobyl complex.

Ukraine wants cash for plants in Rivne and Khmelnytsky, but the EBRD has so far balked at the projects' \$1.2 billion price tag, preferring Ukraine to modernise its 14 oil- and coal-fired power stations to make up for power shortfalls.

Saturday, Ukrainian Prime Minister Valery Pustovoytenko said Kiev would not close Chernobyl down in 2000 as planned unless the Group of Seven industrialised nations released the necessary funds.

In 1995, Ukraine and the G7 signed an agreement to close down Chernobyl in 2000 in exchange for \$3.1 billion in aid from the G7.

Military drills start in eastern Taiwan

TAIPEI (AFP) — Taiwanese forces embarked on a military exercise Monday but officials sought to downplay the sea- and land-based drills to avoid angering Beijing.

"The exercise kicked off in Hualien and Taitung and on the sea off that area," a military spokesman said.

He said the drills, code-named Han Kuang 14 (Han Glory), were a routine attempt to review the military's training and combat capability.

Reserve units were mobilised in the first series of exercises ever held in eastern Taiwan, local television reported.

The spokesman confirmed reports that a submarine was found spying on a rehearsal of the drills Friday, during which a French-made Mica medium range air-to-air missile was fired from a Mirage 2000-5.

The missile destroyed the target — a mock Su-27 of the Chinese air force — dozens of miles away.

"An unidentified submarine was indeed discovered on the open seas east of Taiwan, but it left after its operation was exposed," he said.

He played down significance of the incident as "passage of submarines in the open seas is normal and routine," without elaboration.

Quoting military sources, the China Times said it was a U.S. Los Angeles-class attack submarine.

It was the first time the Mica had been tested outside France. Taiwan has bought 960 of the missiles.

Lin Yu-Fang, parliamentarian of the opposition New Party, insisted that any foreign ship spying on the drills should be regarded as a mock enemy, and closely monitor it, regardless of its nationality.

Washington is the largest arms supplier to the island.

Mr. Lin, a military expert, said the submarine was in the exercise area to gather information about the weaponry made by France, a chief competitor of the U.S. on the international arms market.

MP Lee Ming-Kao of the ruling Kuomintang gave credit to the navy for detecting the submarine. There has been criticism here that Taiwan is deficient in anti-submarine capability.

"If the report proves to be true, it shows the military has brought into full play the new weapons they have acquired," despite the quietness of the nuclear-fuelled submarine, Mr. Lee said.

In an apparent bid to protect delicate Taipei-Beijing ties, the spokesman requested that the drills should "not be associated with other matters."

Taipei sent negotiators to Beijing last month on the first fence-mending trip in almost three years, after China sent a letter to Taiwan agreeing to resume visits by negotiators.

Cook under attack over arms-to-Sierra Leone scandal

LONDON (AFP) — British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook Monday faced a barrage of criticism over the arms-to-Sierra Leone scandal, blamed for the biggest crisis in Prime Minister Tony Blair's 12-month Labour administration.

Mr. Cook's political reputation was on the line, accused at best of gross incompetence over his apparent ignorance about the British government's role in a sanctions-busting counter-coup in Sierra Leone, or at worst of lying to parliament that he knew nothing about it.

The foreign secretary, one of the three "big-hitters" in the Labour administration, is not seen as likely to lose his job now, but the scandal could badly undermine Mr. Cook's long-term position.

Tuesday, he will face a grueling 60 minutes of questioning in parliament, with the opposition Tories determined to put him

under the spotlight over the affair.

"Robin Cook is widely regarded as one of the ablest members of the Labour government. He is also one of its biggest disappointments," wrote the highly-respected Financial Times business daily.

The controversy confronts Labour, which launched a much-heralded "ethical" foreign policy after sweeping to power last May, with a scandal that could rival the arms-to-Iraq affair, which was brilliantly exploited by Mr. Cook in opposition to help topple the Tories.

Ironically, the government's alleged support for a firm of mercenaries that helped to restore elected President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, ousted in a military coup in May 1997, was for a good cause.

Britain's High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Peter Penfold, alleged to have suggested that Kabbah approach

Sandline International, a British firm of military consultants, to supply guns for the counter-coup, is a hero in Freetown.

But the action, in which 30 tonnes of guns and ammunition were flown from Bulgaria in February to local forces in Sierra Leone, was in defiance of a U.N. arms embargo.

Three possible explanations for the embarrassing debacle were suggested in the British press Monday.

Either Mr. Cook and his deputy, Tony Lloyd, were lying when they told parliament they were not aware of Foreign Office involvement in the operation by Sandline to provide arms to pro-Kabbah forces.

Or information about the counter-coup was passed up through the line of command towards ministers, but they did not read it.

Or else officials deliberately conspired to keep ministers in the dark.

Despite disbelief that the foreign secretary could

have been unaware of an operation that Sandline claims had been sanctioned by senior Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence officials, many commentators tend to the view that Mr. Cook failed to read his ministerial briefings.

"I have recognised that you can be a successful foreign secretary if you focus on the big questions and not necessarily if you finish the paperwork," he said tellingly in a BBC interview earlier this year.

Although not a cause for immediate resignation, Mr. Cook's apparent lack of grasp over his own department's affairs is a damning indictment for a man who has been caught up in repeated controversies over the last 12 months, including efforts to replace his official secretary with his lover (now wife) and a diplomatically disastrous visit to Israel in March.

Mr. Lloyd, his number two, who has a special responsibility for Africa,

may be first in the firing-line: he visited Sierra Leone in March, yet claimed ignorance about the affair until May 1, later retracting this to admit he knew already in mid-April.

There are already two inquiries ordered into the affair, a criminal one under the Customs and Excise Department and an independent inquiry promised by Mr. Cook which will make its findings public.

If the government did sanction the counter-coup, Sandline could be in the absurd situation of facing prosecution for a sanctions-busting operation carried out with official approval.

This would be a mirror image of the arms-to-Iraq affair, which burst into the open in 1992 when the trial of a British tool machinery company which had broken an arms embargo to Iraq in the late 1980s collapsed sensationally, after evidence emerged that the Tory government had connived in the exports.

Italian mudslide death toll climbs to 124

ROME (AFP) — The toll in last week's devastating mudslides in the Campania region of southern Italy has risen to 124, the Italian civil defence service said Monday.

More bodies were hauled from mountains of mud in Sarno, the town worst hit by the disaster, taking the toll there to 103. Ninety-seven of the victims were given a mass funeral service in the town's stadium Sunday.

The number of dead in the other badly-hit villages remained the same.

No definite figure for the number of people still missing was available. Late Friday officials in Rome put the figure at 107, down from the estimates of 200 given earlier in the day. But local authorities and emergency services at the scene said a more realistic figure was between 300 and 400.

Monday was declared a national day of mourning.

Lithuanian ship attacked by pirates in Indian Ocean

MOSCOW (AFP) — Pirates attacked a Lithuanian merchant vessel in the Indian Ocean at the weekend, seriously wounding one of the officers on board, Interfax news agency reported Monday.

The Algirdas, en route from Calcutta to Singapore, was 40 miles off the Thai island of Puket when it was waylaid by a smaller vessel carrying some 25 pirates.

Ten armed men boarded the ship and opened fire on the crew, shooting the second-in-command through the throat, Interfax said, citing officials in the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda.

The pirates tied the crew to the ship's rail and smashed the ship's radio, before stealing any personal belongings and other valuables they could find.

After they left the ship one of the crew managed to free himself and send out an alert on a portable telephone.

Kosovo leader fears radicalisation among separatists

PRISTINA (AFP) — One of the main Kosovo Albanian leaders, Mahmut Bakalli, has said that he fears a radicalisation of the separatist movement because of the current lack of dialogue with Belgrade.

"I fear that the doctrine of a peaceful solution (for the crisis), supported by Ibrahim Rugova, will fail if we do not hurry up and start a dialogue," Mr. Bakalli told AFP Sunday.

Mr. Bakalli, a former Communist leader, is one of the most influential personalities in Kosovo.

Mr. Rugova, Kosovo's unofficial president, has included him in his team for possible talks with Belgrade on the status of the troubled Serbian province, whose population is 90 per cent ethnic Albanian.

A majority of the population has been demanding independence for the province, whose autonomy Belgrade revoked in 1989.

Mr. Bakalli stressed the

importance of negotiations, in order to "marginalise those who are trying to solve the problem by force."

He said the conflict in Kosovo was "a big test for the international community, which will show if it is capable of preventing a war by economic, diplomatic and political means."

"I hope that it will not come to the worst option, to prevent by force an escalation of war," Mr. Bakalli said.

He warned that political parties and other legitimate ethnic Albanian bodies had no control over "important groups of Albanians who have taken up arms to obtain freedom."

A part of the Kosovo youth "have lost patience and started activities which, among the majority of youngsters, have created an illusion that freedom can be reached by violence," Mr. Bakalli said.

This has meant that the

underground Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), regarded by Belgrade as a terrorist movement, "has become a model for collective identification for a part of young people."

"The UCK is not a serious military formation," Mr. Bakalli opined, however. He said it was not the armed wing of any political party or legitimate body of the Kosovo republic, self-proclaimed by Kosovo Albanians in 1992.

The clandestine UCK rebels have claimed responsibility for a series of deadly attacks on Serbian targets and Albanians loyal to the Belgrade regime.

"The UCK men do not like Rugova and they have organised a sort of militant and violent action, since they want to distance themselves from Rugova's peaceful policy," Mr. Bakalli said.

"These young people are at the barricades, and they will cut your eyes out if you

mention Rugova," Mr. Bakalli added.

He believed that the Kosovo Albanian political parties "control the essential front of Albanian people."

"But if a political dialogue is postponed, the spiral of violence will continue," Mr. Bakalli warned.

For him, one thing is certain: "The Serbian state cannot rule the two million Albanians" who make up 90 per cent of the population of the province.

Any solution by which two million Albanians remained under Serbian state jurisdiction is not possible, as they could not be pacified under a Serbian state, Mr. Bakalli said.

But he opposed any modification of the borders in the region. He proposed creation of "a federation or confederation" in which Kosovo would have the same status as the republics of Serbia and Montenegro which now form Federal Yugoslavia.

Arrest warrant out for Bhutto

KARACHI (AFP) — A Pakistani high court issued an arrest warrant for former Premier Benazir Bhutto Monday after her failure to appear in a case of alleged administrative corruption, court officials said.

Justice Ghous Mohammad of the Sindh High Court issued the non-bailable warrant after Ms. Bhutto, Pakistan's main opposition leader, failed to show up when he resumed the hearing, they said.

Ms. Bhutto is currently on a private trip to Canada, the United States and Britain and expected to return here this week, party sources said.

The judge dismissed the application of her counsel, Reza Rabbani that Ms. Bhutto was abroad and he could not tell her the date of the case.

The judge adjourned the hearing until May 19.

In a similar situation last month, the same judge issued bailable warrants against Ms. Bhutto. However when she appeared in person he accepted her plea to adjourn the case until her return in early May.

Ms. Bhutto's three-year old government was sacked in November 1996 on charges of corruption and misrule.

An accountability bureau, set up by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government, has filed a case in the high court accusing Ms. Bhutto supporters of finding jobs at Pakistan International Airlines for party members, in violation of the rules.

Opposition urges absent Suharto to step down to end violence

JAKARTA (AFP) — Indonesia's main opposition figures, including an outspoken Muslim leader, turned up the heat on President Suharto Monday urging an end to his 32-year rule and pledging to unite the forces calling for reform.

The calls came as an absent Mr. Suharto appealed for Indonesians to make more sacrifices in a speech to a meeting of G15 developing nations in Cairo.

"There is no other choice, I would tell him (Suharto). It is enough to go this far, do not cling on because it may lead to daily bloody clashes," Amien Rais, the outspoken leader of the 28-million strong Muhammadiyah Islamic movement said.

To loud applause from some 2,000 people thronged in a sports hall for a celebration to mark a meeting of a Muhammadiyah-affiliated women's organisation, Mr. Rais said the government had lost the people's trust.

Students and the population had found the courage to demand a change in the national leadership, he said.

Students, who have been protesting in towns across Indonesia since February to demand immediate reforms, have upped the ante in recent days and included calls for Mr. Suharto to step down.

Some of the rallies have turned violent, with clashes with security forces leaving at least two dead and hundreds injured in past weeks.

Riots and looting have pushed the unconfirmed death toll to nine.

The "Group of Oct. 28", gathering several leading critics and members of the opposition and dissident movement, earlier Monday called on the legislative assembly to reverse its March decision to appoint Mr. Suharto as president and Bacharuddin Yusuf Habibie as vice president for 1998-2003.

A statement signed by 39 members of the group also said it was setting up a national committee to coordinate support for reforms.

The People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) should reverse the March appointments "if it really respects the aspirations and interests of the people," said Supeni, a former ambassador under the late President Sukarno, reading a statement addressed to the people of Indonesia. If the assembly retains the two leaders then "all form and level of comprehensive reform which we have fought for will have been useless." The Oct. 28 group also includes Mr. Rais and ousted opposition figure Megawati Sukarnoputri. However, their signatures were not among the 39 names on the statement, which included many respected former politicians and government officials including Ali Sadikin, the former governor of Jakarta.

The statement also slammed the 1,000-member assembly for accepting Mr. Suharto's account of

his last five years in office which "gave the impression that he is escaping responsibility from all the problems that have taken place."

Accepting the speech was "a big mistake or even a tragedy for the nation's history," Mr. Supeni said.

Mr. Suharto, 76, who has ruled with an iron grip for more than three decades, was reappointed by the assembly, which is packed with his own cronies and loyalists and only meets every five years.

"Indonesia must implement big and comprehensive reforms in the fields of the economy and finance with the cooperation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)," Mr. Suharto told a summit of the Group of 15 developing nations.

"For this to be accomplished we must make huge sacrifices," he said.

Mr. Suharto's leadership has come under mounting attack for its handling of the crippling economic crisis which has seen the rupiah plunge and the cost of staple goods skyrocket.

Mr. Rais said the crisis faced by Indonesia was no longer a mere crisis of the economy but a crisis of confidence. "People's trust in the government is no longer there," Mr. Rais said to the deafening applause and shouts of "it is true" in the sports hall in central Jakarta.

Mr. Rais was among the few Indonesians who publicly dared to challenge Mr. Suharto's sole candidacy for the current presidential term.

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Insurance companies will not be given more time to increase capital to JD2m

**** THERE IS no intention to extend the grace period given to insurance companies to adjust to the requirement of raising their capital to JD2 million, the insurance commissioner at the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply has stressed.**

Comptroller Basil Hindawi said the grace period was over and it will not be renewed, especially as most of the companies have met the requirement before the end of the deadline. Noting that only three companies did not complete the measures to raise their capital, Mr. Hindawi urged them to fully expedite the work and consequently avoid being subjected to legal penalties.

"The policy of the ministry is fixed in this regard and will not be altered because it is an implementation of the law that is indisputable and binding to all," the comptroller emphasised. He highlighted the importance of mergers as an alternative to meet the requirement and strengthen the financial standing.

Dr. Hindawi said that the newly-established companies, which were set up after 1996, have to raise their capital to JD2 million within two years from being officially licensed to operate. There are three companies in this category that have to increase their capital, the comptroller added.

Asked about the draft of the new insurance law, Dr. Hindawi said it was formulated according to the best international standards. "It was prepared after a thorough study, with the participation of all concerned parties, to be a modern law in all standards and to be in tandem with the requirement of the insurance market," he concluded noting that the new draft law was completed and presented to the Council of Ministers. (AI Ra'i)

Maritime company posts \$3.5m profit

**** THE ARAB Maritime Bridge Company posted \$3.5 million in profit last year, the firm's general manager Abdul Razzaq Abdul Wahhab has said.** He revealed that since 1988 until the end of last year, the company transported around 10 million passengers and half a million small and large vehicles. During the past ten years the company's profit amounted to about JD3 million or nine-fold the firm's capital.

The company was set up in 1985 as a joint Jordanian-Egyptian-Iraqi company, mainly to transport passengers and goods between Amman and Neweiba, the Egyptian port. The capital of the company amounts to \$6 million paid equally by the three countries.

Mr. Abdul Wahhab said the company's fleet comprises two ferries each with the capacity to transport 2,750 passengers, 250 small cars and 37 trucks. The fleet also includes a 260-passenger speed boat (AI Ra'i).

Foreign firms may be allowed to open offices in Tehran

TEHRAN (AFP) — Foreign companies would be allowed to open offices in Tehran for the first time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution under a new policy proposed by the economic ministry, an official said Monday.

Reza Zavarei, the director of the state registrar office, told the English-language daily Tehran Times that the ministry had approved a "set of regulations to guide foreign companies intending to open an office in Tehran."

The regulations, still to be approved by the cabinet, "will solve many problems facing Iran, notably after the break up of the former Soviet Union and Eastern (European Communist) Bloc," he said, without elaborating.

"Foreign firms will be allowed to open offices here on a reciprocal basis and within the framework of business activities defined by our government," the official said, adding that foreign companies were required to "operate within the framework of the country's Islamic tradition."

The Iranian parliament passed a law last November to allow foreign companies to register in Iran.

The law however stipulates that any such authorization would have to be "reciprocated" by allowing Iranian firms to have representation in the country whose firms operate in Iran.

It also obliges the foreign firms to confine their activities here within rules set by the assembly and in conformity with Iranian law.

Until now, foreign firms were not allowed to be legally represented and any activities required special authorization from the government.

Around 30 foreign companies are presently active in Iran under a special status.

Iran has been trying to attract foreign investment, but there has been little interest mainly due to strict laws.

Continent's first euros to be struck in France

PARIS (AFP) — The first euros were to roll out of France's official mint Monday, the first single currency coins to be struck by any of the 11 nations joining the currency.

Economy Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn and European Affairs Minister Pierre Moscovici planned to attend the launch of the one euro coin in the southwest town of Pessac, near Bordeaux.

The first coins will be a limited series, with mass-production due later. The mint has already begun striking the lower denomination cent coins.

By January 2002, when euro notes and coins are to begin to replace national currencies, France is scheduled to strike 7.6 billion coins, or 30,000 tonnes worth, four times the weight of the Eiffel Tower.

That will mean 12 million coins a day during three years for the Pessac mint.

The eight different coins, worth between 0.01 and two euros, will be struck with one European side and one national side.

In France, coins worth 1, 2 and 5 cents will carry the portrait of Marianne, the female symbol of the French republic, while 10s, 20s and 50s will feature a sower. One- and two-euro coins are to carry a tree of life.

Belgium, Spain and Italy are due to begin producing their euros in the summer while Austria has decided to begin in autumn and Germany by end-year.

Saudi Arabia believes oil market on the mend

DAMASCUS (IR) — Saudi Arabia believes oil markets are on the mend with supply and demand back in balance after oil producers started reducing supplies, a Gulf source said Monday.

The source, familiar with Saudi oil policy, said OPEC's biggest producer was "optimistic" that crude prices would continue their recovery from the nine-year lows of early March.

"We are 100 per cent sure prices will not fall," the source told reporters on the sidelines of an Arab energy conference.

He said it could take another four to six weeks to see the full impact on the market of the cuts agreed by OPEC and non-OPEC after a secret meeting held in Riyadh by Saudi Arabia.

"The market is getting tighter. Prices will improve in coming weeks and months," he said, calling the market "well balanced."

But he said all producers, including Saudi, remained open to the possibility of a second round of production cuts if necessary.

Producers were discussing ways to improve the market "including the possibility of further production cuts if required," he said.

Mexico, one of the Riyadh trio of producers which orchestrated the cuts, said last week that the outlook for the market indicated more cuts would probably not be needed.

Major oil producers have pledged reductions of about 1.5 million barrels a day (bpd) to year's end including 1.25 million from Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members.

The source said Saudi Arabia was satisfied that producers were sticking by those pledges.

"We are sure that most countries are committed to pledges — OPEC and non-OPEC," he said.

Estimates were that OPEC and non-OPEC oil producers removed at least 1.3 million barrels a day (bpd) from the market in April compared to the February benchmark for cuts, the Gulf source said.

The estimates came from a number of secondary sources which monitor the market.

Oil markets had found further support from a fall in Russian exports and were likely to draw strength from North Sea maintenance and some improvement in Asian demand, the Gulf source added.

The oil market situation would be discussed further at a scheduled meeting of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) oil ministers on June 16 in Riyadh.

OPEC members, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar and non-OPEC Oman are GCC members along with Bahrain.

OPEC meets in Vienna on June 24.

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REUTERS The Business of Information


Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.7785	0.8141	1.4842	132.63	1.4334	1761.90	2.0018	6.5670
DE Mark	0.5629	-	0.3454	0.8352	74.65	0.8067	985.65	1.1265	3.3532
GB Sterling	1.6288	2.8946	-	2.4169	210.24	2.3343	2852.97	3.2599	9.7010
CH Franc	0.6738	1.1955	0.4132	-	89.37	0.9563	1179.65	134.79	401.12
JP Yen	0.0075	1.3388	0.4625	1.1184	-	1.0803	13.20	160.84	4.4894
CA Dollar	0.6976	1.2916	0.4225	1.0566	1.08	-	1270.80	1.4651	4.3265
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0137	0.3502	0.0847	1322.40	0.8180	-	11.42	3.3988
NL Guilder	0.4995	0.8674	0.3065	74.14	66.22	0.7158	874.85	-	2.9744
FR Franc	0.1679	0.2981	0.1030	24.9085	22.24	0.2406	33.59	33.5900	-

Middle Eastern Currencies									
Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	-	0.7090	3.7505	0.3770	3.6400	0.3015	3.6727	1614.00	3.4025
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	-	5.2898	0.5317	5.1340	0.4252	5.1801	2135.40	4.7990
Saudi Riyal	0.2666	0.1890	-	0.1005	0.97	0.0804	0.98	403.68	0.9072
Bahraini Dinar	2.65	1.8808	9.8491	-	8.65	0.7998	9.74	4016.23	9.0259
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1948	1.0304	1.0304	-	0.0828	1.01	415.93	0.9348
Kuwait Dinar	3.3167	2.3916	12.4395	1.2603	12.07	-	12.18	5021.56	0.9348
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0212	1.0206	0.9911	0.0821	-	412.23	0.9264
Lebanese L1000	-0.66	0.4683	2.4772	0.2490	2.4042	0.1991	2.4258	-	2.2474
Egyptian	0.2939	0.2084	1.1023	0.1108	1.0698	0.0888	1.0794	444.97	-

Energy				
Oil	Last	Previous	Change	%
Brent	14.39	13.79	0.60	4.35
WTI	14.39	13.79	0.60	4.35
Bonny	14.39	13.79	0.60	4.35
Dubai	12.62	12.83	-0.21	-1.64
UL Gas	157.00	156.00	1.00	0.64

JOD Cross Rates				
Currency	Buy	Sell	Change	%
US Dollar	0.708	0.710	-0.002	-0.28
GB Sterling	1.1887	1.1846	0.0041	0.34
DE Mark	0.4004	0.4024	-0.0020	-0.50
CH Franc	0.478	0.4814	-0.0034	-0.71
FR Franc	0.1184	0.12	-0.0016	-1.35
JP Yen	0.5322	0.5348	-0.0026	-0.49
NL Guilder	0.3563	0.3571	-0.0008	-0.22
IT Lira	0.4059	0.4079	-0.0020	-0.49

Main Equity Indices									
Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cls	Open	Close
New York	DOW JONES	9154.79	99.84	1.1	9189.57	9055.4	9055.15	9154.79	9154.79
New York	S&P 500	1115.74	7.6	0.69	1119.13	1108.14	1108.14	1115.74	1115.74
London	FT-SE 100	5022.5	52.8	0.88	5030.9	4997.4	4998.6	5022.5	5022.5
Tokyo	Nikkei 225	15381.9	232.9	1.54	15433.9	15213.3	15148	15381.9	15381.9
Paris	CAC 40	4017.24	110.88	2.84	4017.24	3966.84	3968.36	4017.24	4017.24
Frankfurt	DAX	6341.69	84.11	1.3	6347.8	6305.55	6287.68	6341.69	6341.69

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET															
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHEIKHAN															
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR MONDAY											11/05/1998				
PAST 12 MONTHS	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DEV.	NO. OF	NO. OF	VALUE	OPEN	CLOSE	CHANGE						
HIGH	LOW			SHARES	TRANS.	JD	PRICE	PRICE							
\$ 355.500	170.000	ARAB BANK	15.5	1.05	94	2750	523995	186.00	190.00	4.00+					
2.340	1.620	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	13.6	4.19	22	46660	74074	1.65	1.67	0.02+					
1.300	0.880	HIL. EAST INV. BK.	64.4	0.00	25	30450	29809	93	98	0.05+					
6.160	4.660	THE HOUSING BK.	18.6	3.41	54	1763	102593	5.76	5.87	0.11+					
\$ 4.780	1.790	JOR. KONTAT BANK	9.9	0.00	2	200	381	1.98	1.91	0.07+					
920	590	JOR. GULF BANK	3.9	10.61	12	17600	11656	66	66	-					
\$ 4.000	1.700	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	19.0	0.00	2	1500	9665	1.87	1.86	0.01-					
\$ 3.900	1.500	JOR. INV. F.M. BANK	9.8	0.00	7	1900	2875	1.53	1.53	-					
2.350	1.610	JOR. INV. F.M. BANK/NEW	8	0.00	1	100	155	1.63	1.55	0.08-					
1.400	0.800	NETAL-HAL (BEIRUT)	4.2	0.00	4	5450	4740	0.83	0.87	0.04+					
BANK SECTOR TOTALS											INDEX: 260.05	CHNG: +1.90	237	125875	759710
\$ 1.350	0.900	ARABIAN SEAS INSUR.	49.4	0.00	3	163	147	0.95	0.90	0.05-					
2.300	1.200	HOLY LAND INSUR.	5.9	0.00	2	102	114	1.20	1.14	0.06-					
2.350	1.800	ARAB LIFE INSUR.	8.8	0.00	1	250	550	2.10	2.20	0.10+					
INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS											INDEX: 121.53	CHNG: +0.08	5	513	811
\$ 2.240	1.620	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	9.8	5.47	10	5050	10169	2.02	2.01	0.01-					
5.500	2.450	HIL. MINERALS	73.8	0.00	1	50	225	4.59	4.50	0.09-					
1.550	0.970	NATL. PORTFOLIO	43.5	0.00	14	4700	5128	1.08	1.09	0.01+					
1.120	0.850	REAL ESTATE INV.	17.6	0.00	2	1100	970	0.90	0.90	-					
1.680	1.060	NATL. EAST HOTELS	9	0.00	1	100	110	1.06	1.01	0.06+					
4.600	2.890	ARAB INTL. INV. EDUC.	10.0	2.00	4	1700	6022	4.04	4.01	0.03-					
1.830	1.450	UNIFIED CO.	6.7	7.28	3	600	966	1.52	1.51	0.01-					
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS											INDEX: 114.44	CHNG: -0.14	35	13300	24330
4.450	2.450	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	15.3	4.26	45	37252	94921	2.53	2.58	0.05+					
7.050	5.500	ARAB POTASH CO.	27.1	3.64	1	1000	5500	5.50	5.30	-					
11.250	9.270	JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.0	8.62	10	2492	35939	10.25	10.33	0.08+					
6.100	4.500	JORDAN TANNING	8.4	7.66	1	50	261	5.10	5.22	0.12+					
2.070	1.100	INDUSTRIAL CORP. AGR.	9	0.00	2	450	927	1.30	1.37	0.07+					
\$ 5.740	3.540	ARAB PHARM. MANF.	14.4	3.84	89	38212	198623	5.20	5.21	0.01+					
7.720	1.760	JOR. CERAMIC IND.	8.1	5.41	4	3700	6870	1.76	1.85	0.09+					
4.750	3.870	JOR. PRINT & PACK.	9	0.00	2	1500	644	3.87	3.68	0.19-					
1.440	1.020	JOR. PIPES MANFCT.	9.8	8.47	1	1700	1770	1.28	1.18	-					
\$ 1.420	0.750	RAPHA INDUSTRIES	9	0.00	2	650	528	0.85	0.81	0.04-					
0.70	0.400	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	15.9	0.00	2	750	3458	0.48	0.47	0.01-					
0.620	0.310	NATL. TRADING	9	0.02	10	18350	9542	52	52	-					
0.760	0.370	INTERMED. PETRO. CHEM.	9	0.00	2	4000	1600	4.1	4.0	0.01-					
\$ 2.020	0.910	UNIV. CHIL. IND.	12.9	6.36	3	700	394	3.10	3.26	0.14+					
\$ 3.000	920	NATL. CABLE WIRE MANF.	27.9	0.00	6	1421	1647	1.16	1.16	-					
7.730	530	JOR. SULPHUR-CHEM	11.4	0.00	2	250	150	61	60	0.01-					
1.150	0.460	ARAB PHARM. CO.	14.6	6.36	6	1750	6171	1.30	1.20	0.10-					
\$ 1.540	0.810	UNIV. MED. INDUS.	14.0	6.82	6	4500	3960	87	88	0.01+					
1.200	0.670	JOR. INDUS. RESOURCES	9.1	14.72	3	2856	1938	67	68	0.01+					
1.320	0.320	NATL. CHEMICALS	12.9	6.36	1	1000	1332	1.32	1.36	0.04+					
1.080	0.810	JOR. WDN. CABLE CO.	12.3	11.49	10	800	87	86	87	0.01+					
1.210	1.080	INTL. TOBACCO	7.4	5.56	7	2635	3339	1.27	1.26	0.01-					
1.220	0.870	UNION CH. & YES.	12.0	0.00	10	8000	1000	1.10	1.10	-					
0.860	0.660	JORDAN STEEL	9.1	9.46	5	6384	4687	74	74	-					
0.690	0.570	MID-EAST COMPLEX	10.7	0.00	10	19300	11387	59	59	-					
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS											INDEX: 104.02	CHNG: +0.37	232	167904	405421
GRAND TOTAL											INDEX: 174.87	CHNG: +1.20	529	107592	1190272
PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR MONDAY											11/05/1998				
\$ 1.050	0.910	EXPORT & FIN. BKK. 75%	16.8	0.00	4	4200	2772	91	91	-					
700	340	JOR. TRADE FAC.	9	0.00	13	22750	9720	42	43	0.01+					
530	480	NATL. CO-OP. CENTERS	8	0.00	2	248	124	52	50	0.02-					
800	660	UNION INV. SOI	3	0.00	3	16000	4160	1.00	1.00	-					
620	360	ARAB FIN. INVEST.	9	0.00	12	36500	15324	41	42	0.01+					
1.010	720	AC-SHARGH INV. CO.	10.0	0.00	10	100000	10000	1.00	1.00	-					
610	780	AL-DARAT	39.8	0.00	6	30000	19814	1.00	1.00	-					
600	370	ARAB FOOD & MED.	9	0.00	4	21000	10080	48	48	-					
500	280	NATL. TEXTILE	2	0.00	2	288	288	42	42	-					
160	690	UNION INV. SOI	3	0.00	111	153823	151759	1.33	1.33	0.02-					
690	580	MOBILIST PHARM. 90%	8	0.00	6	6000	2940	60	59	0.01-					
1.660	860	UNION TOBACCO 87.5%	8	8.22	10	14000	14000	1.33	1.33	0.02-					
550	350	NATL. PHARM.	2	0.00	2	600	670	58	57	0.01-					
830	470	INDS. CERAMIC	13.1	0.00	2	250	125	50	50	-					
\$ 950	430	ADVANCED PHARMAS. IND.	9	0.00	9	1219	8298	63	62	0.01-					
710	430	NATL. POULTRY	9	0.00	45	202650	104176	52	52	-					
\$ 950	470	OPTICALS HEARING 75%	9	0.00	4	6200	2294	62	62	-					
1.310	1.000	WORLDWIDE	8	0.00	10	100000	100000	1.00	1.00	-					
GRAND TOTAL											245	916060	533943		
* New 12 months low															
* Stock dividend during the past 12 months															
* Listed during the past 12 months															
* P/E ratio is 100 or more															
* Negative P/E															
* Earnings is zero or N/A for the most recent year															

FIFA challengers clash in Asia

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — The battle for the most powerful job in world football moves east this week with Lennart Johansson and Joseph Blatter scrapping for key Asian votes for their June 8 showdown.

Johansson, president of the European Football Union, UEFA, and Blatter, general secretary of the world body FIFA for 12 years, make a bid for the 39 Asian votes up for stake when they address the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) congress.

Asia's votes in the battle between the burly Swede and the dapper Swiss to succeed Joao Havelange as FIFA president are expected to be crucial in deciding the outcome two days before the opening match of the sport's summit in France.

Johansson believes he has the backing of Europe and Africa, although Blatter fired a shot across his bows by opening his election campaign at the French Olympic headquarters in Paris. Latin America and Asia are leaning to the former Swiss colonel, whose rapport with the 198 national football associations on five continents gives him grassroots appeal.

Johansson has built his campaign on an appeal to the top officials in continental federations, promising them a bigger voice in FIFA and more money for the development of the game.

But the Swede was disappointed by the apparent indifference reaction he got when he last visited Asia in April, when AFC General Secretary Peter

Velappan got Johansson to speak to AFC executive committee members at a ceremony for AFC's new building in Kuala Lumpur.

At the same time Blatter proved he could play politics better by reaffirming his ties in private meetings with individual secretaries of Asian federations.

In contrast to the FIFA battle, bloc interest more than personal rapport appears likely to determine the elections to the AFC executive committee and to the federation's two executive committee slots in FIFA.

Incumbent President Sultan Ahmad Shah of Malaysia was unopposed as president when nominations closed in mid-March. At Thursday's elections, the vital contests are for 10 executive committee seats and two seats at FIFA.

AFC has 45 members but only 39 are eligible to vote in the continental congress and at FIFA. Palestine, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cambodia, North Korea and Mongolia are ineligible because they did not field teams in a required minimum of two AFC competitions in the preceding term.

At present there is a preponderance of members from West Asia in AFC's executive committee.

Among the AFC exco's 20 members, eight are from the region and the important committees of competitions, finance, referees and discipline are chaired by West Asians. Further, two of three exco seats for AFC at FIFA are in the hands of Abdullah Al Dabal

(Saudi Arabia) and Mohammed Hammam (Qatar).

In Thursday's elections, Dabal, incumbent Warawi Makudi of Thailand and Junji Ogura of Japan are in a three-way contest for the two FIFA seats (Hammam's comes up for election in 2000).

AFC has five blocks — West Asia (14 affiliates, 12 votes), South Asia (seven affiliates, six votes), Central Asia (five affiliates, all eligible), Southeast Asia (10 affiliates, nine votes) and East Asia (nine affiliates, eight votes).

Japan, by dint of being joint host for the 2002 World Cup, feel they should win one of the two FIFA seats because West Asia already has Hammam at FIFA. Southeast Asia wants Warawi retained.

All this, of course, does not reckon with the considerable pull Saudi Arabia exerts over the West Asian bloc, a clout that will be mustered towards returning Dabal and the countries of Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon and United Arab Emirates, the present incumbents, to the AFC exco (10 seats for countries).

But if Central and South Asia support a move by the East and Southeast Asian blocs to reduce West Asian representation then the beneficiaries would be Ogura and Warawi.

In that event, representation at the vital committees of the AFC would be more evenly balanced in a complex game of blocs.

Injuries nag Dodgers' Asian pitchers

MIAMI (AFP) — Japan's Hideo Nomo and South Korea's Park Chan Ho are in questionable health for the Los Angeles Dodgers, whose Asian starting pitchers are searching for answers to injuries.

The Dodgers (18-18) won 4-2 over Florida here Sunday to complete an 11-game road trip that included Nomo removing himself from a game Saturday with pain in the middle finger of his right hand.

Nomo has an acrylic nail on the middle finger of his right hand to protect the fingernail, which split during his rookie season in 1995. The nail was loose and causing pain when he threw.

"It hurt too much, I couldn't pitch with it," Nomo said. "The nail didn't split, but underneath the nail my finger hurt a lot, that's why I came out."

Nomo gave up five hits, four runs and threw 72 pitches in only two innings. Manager Bill Russell and trainer Charlie Strasser said the acrylic nail would have to be removed before they could determine the cause of the pain.

When Nomo split his fingernail during his rookie season, he did not miss a start. But no one knew the extent of the injury or if he would miss any time, only that Nomo and Park were questionable.

Park had to come out of his start against the Marlins on Friday after four innings when he felt recurring pain in his lower back.

Jordan's Alkhas named to Asian All-Star team

By Raufan Nahhas
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Whoever said that Jordanian "men cannot jump" must have been wrong. Dead wrong.

For the 2-metre 6cm (6.9 feet) Zeid Alkhas it all started with an interest in soccer which developed into basketball fever.

The Al Ahli Basketball Club player and star centre of the Jordanian national basketball team will be representing Jordan as part of the Asian All-Star team against Taipei May 25-June 1.

Alkhas was chosen to represent the Kingdom in the All-Star Team for the second time after his impressive achievement in the first match last year.

He said the experience of playing side by side with the best players in Asia as "incredible."

"I am proud to represent Jordan and be part of the Asian All-Star team."

"I was named top scorer and best rebounder last year," Alkhas told the Jordan Times. "I had 25 points and 15 rebounds."

Alkhas was named to the All-Star team and earned a university scholarship after leading the Jordanian youth team at the Asian Championship to third place and the World Championship finals in 1995.

The scholarship is the first given to a Jordanian for his achievement in sports, and Alkhas is now studying at Buffalo University in the U.S. while playing in the first division team.



Zeid Alkhas

"My university team failed to reach the finals of the American Universities Basketball Championship," he said.

Comparing playing and training styles, Alkhas said: "There is a big difference between training in the U.S. and here. Teams there have everything. We have financial support, gyms and five coaches," he added.

"Players there breathe basketball and the game becomes a way of living," he pointed out.

"The coach plays an important part in the life of a team."

"Having an experienced coach is essential to build a well-prepared team," he said.

He also stressed the role of officials. "Choosing a coach who can communicate with

the players is also the key to understanding the needs of each player," he continued.

Last but not least is the dedication of the players. "More dedication, more love to your team and country is what's needed," he added.

Alkhas said the lack of suitable basketball courts is the main problem in Jordan.

He said Jordan's national team is heading in the right direction.

"With players like Ayman Du'ais, Fadi Sagga and Ma'an Odeh, our team can make a difference," he said.

With high hopes for a promising future Alkhas had one message for all the players in Kingdom. "Work hard and keep hoping for the best."

Passarella has Pele's vote

PARIS (AFP) — His pedigree is not in question and Argentine fans will forever have a place in their hearts for coach Daniel Passarella, who held the trophy aloft as skipper following the South American's first World Cup triumph in 1978.

But not everybody is a supporter and Federation president Julio Grondona was openly critical after a friendly defeat by Israel in April threatened to sink preparations for World Cup group clashes against Japan, Jamaica and Croatia.

However, a 1-0 victory over Brazil in Rio last month gave Passarella a much needed boost.

Despite leading Argentina comfortably through the qualifiers — they topped their regional group losing just two of sixteen matches —

Passarella has continually been hampered by bad relations between him and goalscoring hero Gabriel Batistuta.

Passarella has an autocratic streak and insists that unless the side's all-time leading scorer agreed to play the way Passarella wanted he risked missing the finals.

Although Batistuta returned — and scored — in a recent friendly win over Bulgaria, Passarella has often preferred to plump for Parnas's Hernan Crespo, who played for Passarella at River Plate.

"I like one of my forwards to play on the outside and one to play down the middle. Crespo is more willing to play to this style," sniffed Passarella, who has also shown the door to Real Madrid's Fernando Redondo for refusing to get his hair cut.



Passarella, who turns 45 on May 25 and who scored 24 goals in his 71 international appearances despite playing sweepers, has to deliver the goods amid reports that Argentina's 1986 winning coach Carlos Bilardo is mulling over a return to the helm.

Born in the city of Chacabuco in Buenos

Aires province Passarella, who made his name with River Plate as a sweeper before moving to Italy, has already conceded he is about ready to step aside after four years in charge. "I think I'm about 99 per cent sure I'd like to move on after the cup — probably to Europe," he says.

Title euphoria for Juve, Lens — gloom for Real

PARIS (AFP) — Juventus fans had, of course, seen it all before, but they greeted the Turin Giants' 25th Serie A title as enthusiastically as ever after the "Zehras" put the issue beyond doubt on Sunday courtesy of a Filippo Inzaghi hat trick against Bologna.

But "Super Pippo" had to share centre stage this weekend with one of European soccer's unsung journeymen in the shape of Yohan Lacombe, who secured Lens' first ever title in France after scoring the championship-winning goal at Auxerre on Saturday.

You won't find two clubs in the whole of Europe with more contrasting histories, with super-rich Juve numbered among the game's princes and little Lens very much on the side of the paupers, given their blue-collar origins.

Yet the French outfit has earned the right to rub shoulders with the big guns after overhauling similarly modest Metz by the slenderest of margins — just five goals — following Saturday's 1-1 draw.

As Juventus contemplated yet another European Cup final on May 20 and "business as usual" in the form of yet another Champions League campaign, wide-eyed Lens fans were singing deliriously into the night as the measure of their side's achievement sank in.

And, typically, their down-to-earth heroes toasted their success not with champagne but cans of lager.

Virtually the only thing the two championship-winners have in common is that they are both northern industrial towns, although Lens boasts a population of barely 35,000. And yet 30,000 came to celebrate at their Felix Bollaen stadium until the small hours.

The French side's title win was achieved without the resources available to the likes of Marseille and Paris St. Germain as Daniel Leclercq's side relied instead on old-fashioned hard graft, plus the inspiration provided by two Eastern European imports: Czech star Vladimir Smicer and Yugoslav striker Anton Drobnyak.

Half of the winning squad came

through the club's youth scheme, whereas Juve have the pick of any player in the world.

Lens' only previous success of any kind came when they were winners of the unofficial wartime league in 1944, and after a 92-year wait the extent of the celebrations were understandable.

Lens' coach Daniel Leclercq said: "This title is the reward for attacking football." His side ended the season equal top scorers with Auxerre with 55 goals in 34 games.

"Today we are dreaming of Barcelona, Juventus and Arsenal," added Leclercq.

Club president Gervais Martel said: "This is the culmination of 10 years hard work."

Martel said the club's passionate fans, many decked head-to-toe in the team's red and gold colours, had played a key role in the team's success.

Italian passions were for once barely able to top those in France, but success at Juve is so routine their fans have perhaps become almost blasé.

Rivals Inter Milan gave the Old Lady a hand by throwing away any chance they might have had of lifting the "Scudetto" as they conceded two goals in the last five minutes to go down 2-1 to Bari.

And Inzaghi's explosive form did the rest as Juventus picked up their third league title in the past four seasons.

Juventus must now be confident of putting the European Cup back in their trophy cabinet for the third time as they face a Real Madrid side in growing disarray in the May 20 final in Amsterdam.

Last season's Spanish champions have inexplicably lost form and slumped to defeat at Espanyol on Saturday, meaning they could miss out on next season's Champions League.

Other results meant Real dropped down to fourth place with just one game left.

Real went down to Roberto's only goal midway through the second half and then had to watch as Athletic Bilbao

put themselves two points clear of Real, albeit with a disappointing goalless draw at Merida.

Barcelona's 5-2 thrashing at Atletico Madrid on Sunday evening was scant consolation for Real fans as their rivals have long wrapped up the title.

Real Sociedad moved above Real despite dropping careless points as they could only draw 1-1 at home to Tenerife, for whom former Middlesbrough man Emerson was on target. But Sociedad still went third ahead on goal difference.

In fact Real, without an away win in the league for almost six months, could have dropped to fifth had Mallorca won at Salamanca, but that game ended in another draw as the top five failed to muster a win between them.

Club president Lorenzo Sanz said he was flabbergasted by the team's latest setback.

"I have spoken to them all, coach Jupp Heynckes and the players. But it just hasn't made any difference," he wailed.

Heynckes faces a meeting with club officials in midweek to decide his future — which appears to lie away from the Bernabeu.

In the German Bundesliga, Karlsruhe and Cologne, for the first time, dropped out of the top flight as Borussia Moenchengladbach and Bochum pulled themselves out of the fire with victories.

Police arrested around 265 Cologne fans after they went on the rampage following their side's demotion. It was a far cry from the club's glorious past, which includes three championships.

Talenders Arminia Bielefeld are the third team to slide into the second division.

Champions Kaiserslautern ended the season with a 1-1 draw in Hamburg while second-placed Bayern Munich crushed Borussia Dortmund 4-0 in a match of little significance. Dortmund, European champions a year ago, will not play in Europe next year.

Vogts picks Matthaus for France '98

FRANKFURT (AFP) — Germany coach Bert Vogts has included former captain Lothar Matthaus in his squad for the 1998 World Cup finals.

Matthaus, Germany's most capped player (122 internationals), last competed for Germany against Albania on December 18, 1994.

The 37-year-old's international career appeared over but the long-term absence of Matthaus Sammer left the libero position wide open.

He was booted out of the Germany team acrimoniously two years ago, just before the European championships in England.

Matthaus verbally attacked Vogts and savaged former Bayern Munich teammate Jurgen Klinsmann for allegedly spreading poisonous rumours and actively lobbying to have him removed from the national squad.

It came down to a Klinsmann versus Matthaus power struggle with neither emerging a clear winner. Matthaus did not for Germany again after the long running dispute and Klinsmann succeeded him as captain.



Bayern Munich libero Lothar Matthaus gestures during a German league match against Bayer Leverkusen in this September 1996 file photo. German soccer team coach Bert Vogts announced he had recalled veteran Matthaus for the World Cup finals in France. Matthaus, who captained Germany to victory in the 1990 World Cup, earned the last of his record 122 caps in December 1994 (Reuters photo)

CINEMA	TEL: 567414	CINEMA	TEL: 567414	CINEMA	TEL: 5699338	CINEMA	TEL: 5677420	CINEMA	TEL: 5934793	CINEMA	TEL: 5934793	CINEMA	TEL: 5934793	Hisham Yanes Theatre	TEL: 4625155
TODAY AT	PHILADELPHIA '1'	PHILADELPHIA '2'	PLAZA	CONCORD	GALLERIA 2	GALLERIA 1	Hisham Yanes Theatre	STARING APRIL 6TH	Don't Laugh Please	We're Jordanian	Starring Hisham Yanes, Amal Dabbas, Rania Kurdi and the group	at 8:30 p.m.	For reservations call: 4640155, 4625155		
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Hingis wins

ROME (AFP) — Martina Hingis won her first Grand Slam title on Sunday when she beat Venus Williams 6-2, 6-3 in the final of the Italian Open tennis tournament.

Hingis, 20, of Switzerland, won the match in 77 minutes, her fastest in a Grand Slam final. She had won the Italian Open in 1997 and 1998.

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Hingis wins second clay title of 1998

ROME (AFP) — Martina Hingis earned revenge for a defeat six weeks ago when she beat Venus Williams 6-3, 2-6, 6-3 on Sunday to win the \$926,250 Italian Open — her fourth title of the year.

In late March at Key Biscayne, Florida — the last time the pair met — world No.1 Hingis lost to fellow 17-year-old American Williams, going out in the semi-finals on hard court. Williams also beat Hingis in their first match of the year in Sydney.

On Sunday, those defeats were forgotten as Hingis improved to 5-2 in the series.

Hingis won the first set, but dropped serve twice in the second as Williams forced a decider. The Swiss player began the third set with a break but had to fight to emerge victorious after four more breaks of serve before the end.

The match lasted nearly two hours. The trophy was the fourth for Hingis this year and her second in as many weeks on the clay.

Hingis, winner of three of last year's four Grand Slams, has now triumphed at the Australian Open, Indian Wells, Hamburg and Rome so far this year.

Williams played with her left knee taped, a problem which bothered her during a marathon semi-final win over Arantxa Sanchez Vicario on Saturday at the Foro Italico.

Hingis had to be more refreshed after spending just 46 minutes in her semi-final victory over Croatian

Mirjana Lucic.

The two young talents tested out each other's games in the first two games of the match with a pair of back-to-back breaks.

Hingis then hit a spot of poor form, losing ten points in a row as she dropped serve to love in the fifth game and fell to 0-30 in the sixth game before recovering.

She then claimed a break point and capitalised on it for 3-3 when Williams returned long.

The top seed quickly gathered her resolve, holding in the next game and taking her second break of the set against the American.

Williams put herself into a corner when a drop shot landed short and Hingis needed only one of the two break points on offer to take a 5-3 lead.

The Swiss wasted one with a return past the baseline, but took the set a point later when Williams drove a backhand out.

Williams took command in the second set, breaking in the sixth game for 4-2 and levelling the match at a set apiece when Hingis sent a forehand into the net.

Hingis then kept her nerve to win the marathon encounter.

"It was a match of strategy. I knew she was tired from Saturday," said Hingis, who won the last three games of the match. "I thought she might fall apart in the middle of the point, but she didn't, she didn't give up until the end."

Hingis, shorter by at least 20 cm to her rangy American opponent, added: "She's all legs, all arms."

"She takes one step and she's at the ball, she has gone from one corner to the other. I tried to mix it up. But sometimes it didn't work."

"She sometimes had a better answer. But the last three games were OK."

The Swiss said there is little doubt that she and Williams will challenge each other frequently in the future.

"Venus is the toughest (teenager) one of all," said Hingis. "Her consistency has gotten better."

"I've always played her in semis or finals in the last three tournaments. She'll be ready for the French Open for sure. I think she's playing like the world No. 2."

Williams, who heads home to Florida, was far from impressed with her own showing this week.

"I wasn't hitting the ball the way I wanted to," said the American. "Today I worked to stop making mistakes. They still came, but not as much as in the other matches this week."

"It was hard for me to get my footwork straight on the clay. I just don't play on it enough. Near the end of the week, I was able to do that better and better."

"The thing I'll remember being at the site all day and night and trying to get some sleep (playing both singles and doubles). Maybe next year, I won't enter the doubles after all."

Bulls, Lakers, Pacers and Jazz take control

CHARLOTTE (AFP) — Michael Jordan scored 31 points and reigning champion Chicago beat Charlotte 94-80 Sunday, moving within one victory of the National Basketball Association semi-finals.

The Bulls, seeking their third consecutive title and sixth in eight years, took a 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven quarter-final and can oust the Hornets with a victory Wednesday in Chicago.

Utah, runners-up to Chicago in the finals last year, Indiana and the Los Angeles Lakers also won Sunday to take 3-1 leads in their quarter-final matchups.

Reggie Miller scored 38 points, including a dramatic three-point basket to force overtime, and Indiana beat New York 118-107. The Pacers can advance with a home victory Wednesday.

Shaquille O'Neal scored 39 points and the Los Angeles Lakers beat Seattle 112-100. The Lakers can reach the NBA semi-finals for the first time since 1991 by winning Tuesday in Seattle.

Karl Malone played through ankle and wrist injuries and collected 34 points and 12 rebounds as the Jazz beat the Spurs 82-73 for a 3-1 lead.

Jordan returned here to his home state for what might be the final time in his NBA career, having said this could be his final season. Hundreds stayed to the finish to cheer as he walked off the court.

The Hornets led 20-18 after the first quarter but the Bulls pulled ahead 44-40 at half-time and stretched the margin until putting in reserves to finish.

"It was our pressure defence and overall offense," Jordan said. "We kept putting pressure on them and they never responded."

"We took their best shot early on. All we had to do is keep our poise and get ourselves back in to the game."

Chicago's Dennis Rodman, sporting black leopard spots in his colorful dyed hair, pulled down 18 rebounds and scored eight points in the rout.

"Young teams get very excited in the beginning," Rodman said. "They start thinking, 'We got 'em. We got 'em. We got 'em' and they forget to play the rest of the three quarters."

A sellout crowd at New York's Madison Square Garden was silenced when Miller extended a history of leading the Knicks, sinking the equalizer with 5.1 seconds remaining in regulation.

In the final frantic seconds, Indiana centre Rik Smits



Los Angeles Lakers Shaquille O'Neal (R) wins the rebound against Seattle SuperSonics Vin Baker in the fourth period in game four of the Western Conference semifinals. The Lakers won 112-100 to take a 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven series (Reuters photo)

missed a shot and the loose ball was pulled down by Chris Mullin. He passed to Mark Jackson, who found Miller unguarded outside the three-point arc.

"It was a broken play. We were fortunate to get the ball back," Miller said. "I was surprised to be so wide open. Those are the toughest shots to hit on the road. But fortune was with me and I knocked it down."

Allan Houston, whom the Knicks chose over Miller two years ago when bidding for free agents, missed at the buzzer after Miller evened the game at 102-102.

New York did not score in the final 3 1/2 minutes of regulation and the first 3 1/2 minutes of overtime.

Jackson scored the first five points of overtime. Smits scored inside and Miller added a three-pointer with 88 seconds remaining in overtime to give the Pacers a 112-102 edge.

Jackson finished with 16

points and 15 rebounds. Houston scored 19 points to lead New York, but had only one after half-time. Patrick Ewing had 17 points and eight rebounds.

The Knicks went on a 12-4 run to grab their largest lead, 97-89, with five minutes to play in regulation. Dutchman Smith scored 14 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter. "Rik did a great job of keeping us in the game," Miller said.

At Los Angeles, O'Neal hit 15 of 20 shots, pulled down eight rebounds, passed out seven assists and blocked five shots to dominate Seattle, whose three losses to the Lakers have come by an average of 17 points.

"If we play smart, we can play with anybody," O'Neal said. "Everybody is playing great. We have finally realized we have to play as a team if we are going to achieve our goal."

Eddie Jones added 32 points for the Lakers, scoring

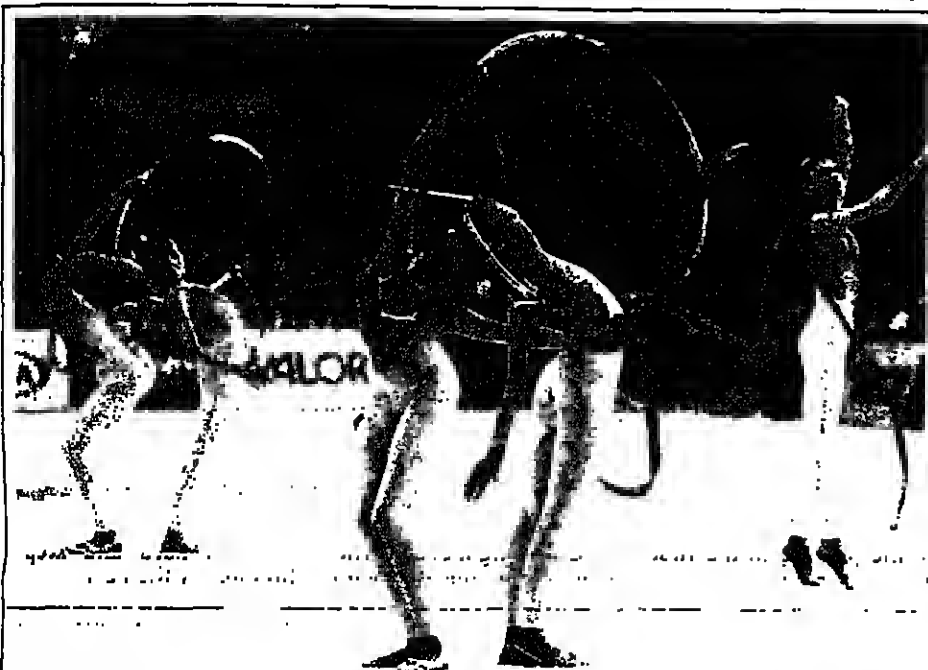
a playoff career high for the third consecutive game.

In the other Western Conference game, Malone, who sprained his ankle late in Game Three, suffered a sprained wrist in Sunday's game. He still shot 17-for-28 from the field, but, amazingly, did not attempt a free throw after going to the line 825 times during the regular season.

Malone scored 10 points in the fourth quarter, sinking jumper after jumper to thwart each run San Antonio made at the lead. His last basket with 45 seconds remaining all but sealed the win, putting the Jazz ahead, 79-73.

Greg Foster added 13 points and Bryon Russell had 12 for Utah, which will return home on Tuesday to try to wrap up its second straight trip to the Western Conference finals.

Tim Duncan netted 22 points and David Robinson had a quiet 15 and 11 boards for San Antonio.



The Spanish team performs an exercise with two hoops and three ribbons to win the gold medal in that category at the world team rhythmic gymnastics championships. Olympic champions Spain won the gold medal at the hoop and ribbon apparatus final with a score of 19.850. Team members are (no L-R identification available): Lorena Gurrendez, Paula Orive, Beatriz Nogales, Sara Bayon, Marta Calamonte and Carolina Malchior (Reuters photo)

Ilie wins first ATP crown

CORAL SPRINGS, Florida (AFP) — Andrew Ilie won his first ATP Tour title here Sunday, beating Davide Sanguinetti 7-5, 6-4 to capture America's Red Clay Championship.

Australian qualifier Ilie took a \$34,300 top prize in the \$245,000 event with his victory over the eighth-seeded Italian. Sanguinetti, 25, started the tournament ranked a career-best 82nd after winning a Challenger series event last month in his homeland.

Ilie, 22, has been slowed by back injuries the past two years. The world's 169th-ranked player has won seven matches in a row and reached his first ATP career quarter-final in Orlando two weeks ago.

"I took a test and my blood pressure was already down," he revealed. "I took some vitamins, but I had a lot of matches. Because of the rain I didn't start until Thursday and didn't have time to recover myself between matches."

"I played today because I have respect for Albert and I didn't want to disappoint the spectators and sponsors," said Corretja. "But I saw already in the morning that I couldn't play. When I practised I got dizzy, and after two games I saw it was impossible for me to play."

"I took a test and my blood pressure was already down," he revealed. "I took some vitamins, but I had a lot of matches. Because of the rain I didn't start until Thursday and didn't have time to recover myself between matches."

Costa wins as Corretja quits

HAMBURG (AFP) — Albert Costa won his first tournament since claiming the Marbella title last September when fellow Spaniard Alex Corretja retired in the third set of their German Open final on Sunday.

Unseeded Costa, who earned \$361,000, led 6-2, 6-0, 1-0 against an opponent who was suffering from fatigue after his semi-final victory against Felix Mantilla on Saturday.

Looking listless right from the start, Corretja sat with an ice towel around his neck at every change-over, and called for the trainer after conceding the opening game of the third set.

Fourth-seeded Corretja, who collected \$190,000, was stretched to three sets in every round, and saved two match points in overcoming Gustavo Kuerten in a draining quarter-final.

Costa also saved match points in his first round win over defending champion Andrei Medvedev, but then won his remaining matches comfortably.

Costa won his first two service games to love and held break point in the second game when Corretja double-faulted. And although Corretja was able to immediately recover a Costa break for 3-1, he was able to offer little resistance after that.

Costa broke again to lead 4-2 and again for the set, and then dropped just one point in the first three games of the second set.

Corretja increasingly failed to run for the ball, and the only entertainment came from a few drop-shots or lobs that broke up the short rallies.

Costa was aware before

the match of Corretja's problem. "We are friends and spoke before the match and he told me he had no power," said Costa. "He played one day six sets, and then three sets in two more matches. It's too much."

"But I feel like a winner despite the way I won because on the first day I was two match points down and feeling bad with my back. That gave me confidence and I played good tennis this week."

Corretja's retirement marked the third time in three days that players failed to last the distance here. Goran Ivanisevic quit in the second set of his quarter-final against Mantilla, suffering from

low blood pressure and a respiratory infection, and Karol Kucera conceded his semi-final against Costa because of blisters.

"I played today because I have respect for Albert and I didn't want to disappoint the spectators and sponsors," said Corretja. "But I saw already in the morning that I couldn't play. When I practised I got dizzy, and after two games I saw it was impossible for me to play."

"I took a test and my blood pressure was already down," he revealed. "I took some vitamins, but I had a lot of matches. Because of the rain I didn't start until Thursday and didn't have time to recover myself between matches."

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMARA HIRSCH
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TEST YOUR PLAY

Both vulnerable. South deals.

NORTH	EAST
♠ 6 4 3	♠ J 8
♥ 10 8 5	♥ 9 7 4 2
♦ A K 7 2	♦ 5
♣ K 4	♣ J 10 8 6 3

WEST: ♠ 10 9 7 2, ♥ K J, ♦ Q 8 4, ♣ A 7
EAST: ♠ J 8, ♥ 9 7 4 2, ♦ 5, ♣ J 10 8 6 3

SOUTH: ♠ A K 5, ♥ A Q 8, ♦ J 10 6 3, ♣ A 5 2

The bidding: WEST NORTH EAST
1NT Pass 2NT Pass

Opening lead: Seven of ♠

Here's your chance to display your dummy-play technique. Cover the East-West cards with your thumbs and decide how you would play three no trump after the lead of the seven of spades. You get to three no trump after a straight power auction. All you have to do is make it after East produces the jack of spades at trick one. (A nod of approval is well earned)

If you duck the first spade and win the continuation. What now? Suppose you cross to the ace of diamonds and take the heart finesse. That loses and back comes a spade, removing your last stopper in the suit as East discards a club. You can now afford the diamond finesse. West covers, but East shows out, shuffling another club. It looks as if you have an end-play. Come to hand with a diamond as East parts with yet another club, cash the ace and king of clubs and exit with a club. East wins and returns a heart, and you are left with a game. Could you have done better?

The play in the first three tricks needs no improvement, but a heart to the ace at trick four offers several additional chances. No matter what West plays to this trick, run the jack of diamonds next. When East shows out, revert to hearts by leading up to queen. Since the jack fell in the first round, dummy's ten is the fulfilling trick. This line wins whenever the straight heart finesse would have, but also produces a ninth trick on two other combinations — when West starts with a doubleton jack or doubleton nine of hearts. You can then establish a heart trick in dummy by force.

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SHOWING THE JEWELS: Jordanian models display jewellery by Egyptian-born artist Suzanne Al Masry at an exhibition in the American Centre in Amman, Sunday. The Egyptian artist works with silver, enamels, semi-precious stones, and is one of a few artists to have work exhibited around the world in her own lifetime (Reuters photo)

Hrawi asks Pope to boycott Bethlehem millennial celebration

BEIRUT (AFP) — Lebanese President Elias Hrawi urged Pope John Paul II not to go to the West Bank town of Bethlehem for the millennium celebration because peace has not yet come to the Middle East, Beirut newspapers reported Monday.

Mr. Hrawi, after meeting the pontiff in the Vatican, said the pope had "agreed 75 per cent" with the request to boycott the celebration in Bethlehem, the French-language L'Orient le Jour said.

During the meeting, Mr. Hrawi told the pope that his request was important for Muslims and Christians of the region, particularly in Lebanon where Israel occupies a "buffer zone" along their border.

The English-language Daily Star said Mr. Hrawi believed that the pope might "avoid celebrating the... millennium jubilee in Bethlehem if peace has not yet been achieved" in the Middle East.

Most of Bethlehem is under the control of the Palestinian National Authority.

Mr. Hrawi led a large Lebanese delegation to the Vatican for Sunday's ceremony to beatify Nirmallah Hardini, a 19th-century Lebanese Christian Maronite monk.

The Lebanese president also met his Italian counterpart, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, Friday in Rome.

ANKARA (AP) — Activists and Islamist writers Monday criticised a government-run human rights board for supporting a ban on Islamic attire at schools and public offices.

"An organisation that is supposed to be the guarantee of human rights [has] issued a decision that says we can encroach the most basic of those rights," commented Fehmi Koru, a columnist for the Islamist daily Zaman.

The Rights Coordinating Board ruled last week that the Islamic-style headscarves, turbans or cloaks were a political symbol and therefore violated Turkey's secular laws and public order.

On Monday, two students and a police officer were slightly injured in scuffles which erupted after a group of students protested an

Netanyahu faces another political storm over bid to conscript rabbinical students

TEL AVIV (AP) — Religious politicians on Monday threatened to bring down Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu if he even considered an opposition bill to conscript Jewish seminary students into the armed forces.

The bill, introduced Monday by Labour Party leader Ehud Barak, reflects secular Israelis' growing resentment of ultra-Orthodox Jews, most of whom don't serve in the army.

Most ultra-Orthodox receive deferment, and are even given a government stipend, provided they are studying full-time at a religious seminary and don't have a job. In recent years, the number of Yeshiva students with deferments has swollen to over 29,000. In the past year, 3,500 new deferments were granted.

Mr. Barak's bill proposes to reduce the number of new deferments to 700 of the most outstanding Torah students each year.

"The aim is equal sharing of the burden," said Mr. Barak, a former armed forces chief of staff and Israel's most highly decorated soldier.

Mr. Barak is the opposition's candidate for prime minister, and apparently has given up any hope of winning the support of ultra-Orthodox

purities. In the May 1996 election, a vast majority of ultra-Orthodox voters backed Mr. Netanyahu.

Mr. Barak's bill is a watershed for the Labour Party which in the past always tried not to alienate the religious parties because it needed them as coalition partners. Mr. Barak apparently hopes to lure some secular voters away from Mr. Netanyahu's Likud Party.

Secular resentment of the ultra-Orthodox cuts across party lines, and Mr. Netanyahu announced that he would appoint a public committee, headed by a retired judge, to examine the issue.

Ultra-Orthodox members in Mr. Netanyahu's coalition said if such a panel is formed, they will bring down the government.

Israeli Deputy Housing Minister Meir Porush warned Mr. Netanyahu that if the issue is raised his United Torah Judaism Party will leave the coalition. "He said the issue is absolutely non-negotiable," Mr. Porush's spokesman, Moshe Friedman, told the Associated Press.

Mr. Porush's party colleague Avraham Ravitz said the right to study Torah full-time is a matter of principle for his constituents.

Israeli prime minister seeks to woo his former finance minister back into fold

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Former Israeli Finance Minister Dan Meridor, an influential moderate in Israel's ruling Likud Party, said Monday that he had rebuffed an invitation from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to return to government.

Mr. Netanyahu met with Mr. Meridor for 90 minutes late Sunday as part of an apparent effort to hold off threats to his fragile coalition government from both the left and the far-right.

"He asked me to return to the government, but I refused as I already rejected a similar offer a month ago because Netanyahu is not worthy to be prime minister and must be replaced," Mr. Meridor told Israel Radio Monday.

"The peace process is slipping away, we are headed into a crisis with the United States and economic and social problems are worsening," Mr. Meridor said.

The Haaretz newspaper said Mr. Netanyahu offered Mr. Meridor the post of foreign minister, which was vacated when another moderate, David Levy, resigned in January in a policy dispute with Mr. Netanyahu.

Mr. Meridor resigned as finance minister last year, ostensibly due to a dispute with Mr. Netanyahu over monetary policy, but he remained in the Likud Party.

But Mr. Meridor was also highly critical of the prime minister's headline stance in negotiations with the Palestinians and his autocratic method of governing.

Mr. Netanyahu's new overture came after

Mr. Meridor was approached by another Likud dissident, Tel Aviv Mayor Roni Milo, who announced last week that he was creating a new centrist party to challenge Mr. Netanyahu in the next national elections.

Mr. Milo met with Mr. Meridor late last week but failed to convince him to team up now against Mr. Netanyahu.

Mr. Meridor, considered one of the most popular Likud figures, did not rule out joining Mr. Milo but said it was too early to make a decision.

Israeli press reports said Mr. Netanyahu was anxious both to undermine Mr. Milo's attempted revolt and enlist Mr. Meridor's support in the event the far-right lodges a motion of no confidence against the government over the Palestinian peace process.

More than a dozen ultra-nationalist deputies in Mr. Netanyahu's coalition have vowed to topple the government if it agrees to U.S. proposals for new withdrawals from the West Bank as part of a deal to revive peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

The issue came to a head this weekend when Mr. Netanyahu rejected the U.S. proposal, forcing the cancellation of a planned summit meeting in Washington Monday with U.S. President Bill Clinton and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

But U.S. mediator Dennis Ross returned to Washington Monday reportedly carrying a new compromise formula which could lead to a deal and a summit later this month.

Mr. Netanyahu has only a 61-seat majority in the 120-member parliament.

NEW YORK (AP) — Sonny Bono is gone, but he and long-time partner Cher are still close. The singer, who gave a moving eulogy for the U.S. congressman who died last winter in a skiing accident, says that she communicates with the entertainer-turned-politician through spiritual medium James Van Praagh.

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"Me too," Azaria quipped. "What can I tell you? I auditioned, like everybody else." Success has brought a hectic pace the usually easygoing actor admits has made him "irritable at times," a mindset that gave him insight into Godzilla's destructive nature.

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Linda McCartney awarded posthumous award

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Potter's expensive letter

LONDON (AP) — A New York City book dealer paid nearly \$240,000 at auction for a letter by the writer Beatrix Potter which included her first drawing of the frog character Jeremy Fisher. The letter was rescued in 1978 by a little girl in Connecticut, who spotted it in a box of junk her parents intended to throw away.

Catherine Potter, a book specialist at Sotheby's, said the price of \$239,670 was an auction record for any book, letter, drawing or manuscript by the famous writer.

Vocal Iraqi minister dismissed from office

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraqi President Saddam Hussein dismissed his minister for labour and social affairs, Abdel-Aziz Muhammad Saleh Al Sayegh, the official Iraqi News Agency reported Monday.

It said the action was taken by a republican decree. The agency gave no further details or say who would fill his portfolio.

In an interview with a Baghdad weekly last month, Mr. Al Sayegh was reported to have said that Iraqi prisons suffered from overcrowding and that the number of prisoners in Iraq was five times the capacity of its prisons.

He was harshly attacked by the press for the state of Iraqi jails. It is not known whether criticism by the media had any bearing on his dismissal.

Mr. Al Sayegh assumed his post in December 1996.

Press: Kuwaiti collaborator with Iraq escapes to Turkey

KUWAIT (AP) — A Kuwaiti who was appointed by Baghdad as the head of an interim government in Kuwait shortly after the 1990 Iraqi invasion of this small state has fled to Turkey, Al Rai Al Am daily reported Monday.

The man, Ala Hussein Ali, did not return to Kuwait after the February 1991 liberation, reportedly opting to live in the Iraqi capital.

The newspaper quoted "reliable sources" it did not name as saying Mr. Ali fled Baghdad to Turkey with the help of Kurds to escape financial and personal problems. Mr. Ali had reportedly lost his good relations with the Iraqi leadership.

The daily said Mr. Ali contacted a Gulf merchant from Ankara asking for \$50,000 to be needed to leave Turkey to a neighbouring country, but the merchant declined.

Greenpeace: Turkish nuclear reactor poses threat to Middle East region

BEIRUT (AP) — A planned Turkish nuclear reactor poses a threat to countries from North Africa to Central Asia, the environmental group Greenpeace said in a study released Monday.

The report predicts how contamination would spread if there were an accident at the proposed nuclear power plant at Akkuyu Bay on Turkey's southeastern Mediterranean coast.

"The siting of nuclear power reactors [in Turkey] is a potential hazard for the entire region, not just Turkey," the report warns.

The report noted that because of air masses and wind patterns over southern Turkey, countries from North Africa to the Gulf region as well as Uzbekistan and

Kazakhstan in Central Asia would be at "substantial risk" should an accident occur at the plant.

Greenpeace, which said Turkey plans to build 10 nuclear plants by 2020, urged Ankara to instead "invest in cleaner, safer and cheaper alternatives, such as energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies." The study was commissioned by Greenpeace and conducted by the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at Australian National University in Canberra.

Turkey is to decide later this year on whether to build the Akkuyu plant. Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. and Germany's Siemens are the two leading bidders, Greenpeace said.

Hamas founder meets Kuwaiti crown prince Sheikh Yassin says he declined Iraqi invitation until missing Kuwaitis controversy is resolved

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, founder of the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, met Kuwait's crown prince here Monday amid rumblings of discontent from MPs who accuse Hamas of maintaining links with Iraq.

The official Kuwaiti news agency KUNA said several ministers also attended the talks between Kuwaiti Crown Prince Saad Al Abdullah Al Sabah and Sheikh Yassin, the first Palestinian leader to visit the emirate since the 1991 Gulf war.

The Hamas founder and spiritual guide flew in Saturday to a warm reception at the airport from Islamist MPs, but was snubbed by liberal MPs although they avoided criticism of Sheikh Yassin himself.

"The Hamas movement does not always take into account the dangers which the Baghdad regime poses for the region," said Samir Manis, an MP of the liberal Democratic Forum grouping.

Earlier this year, the Palestinian group threatened to launch new anti-Israeli attacks if the United States undertook military action against Iraq during a

crisis over U.N. arms inspections.

Sheikh Yassin, who was freed in October after eight years in Israeli jail, has called for Kuwait "to turn a new page" in relations with the Palestinians and said he was seeking its "moral, material and political support."

Kuwait, the fifth leg of a Gulf tour by Sheikh Yassin, suspended ties with Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) because of its support for Baghdad during the crisis which followed Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait and led to the Gulf war.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled from Kuwait after the war which evicted Iraqi troops.

Sheikh Yassin told KUNA that he has also received an invitation from Iraq but that he declined to visit Baghdad until it settled the issue of Kuwaitis missing from the occupation.

The spiritual guide of Hamas was invited to Kuwait by Sheikh Saad. Since April, he has already been to Iran, Qatar and Saudi Arabia on a regional tour and is also expected to visit Sudan.

Palestinian journalist tortured by Palestinian police — rights group

RAMALLAH (AFP) — A Palestinian television cameraman under detention by Palestinian security forces has undergone "severe torture," a human rights group said on Monday.

Abbas Momeni, 25, a cameraman for Reuters television, has "undergone torture by various means," including beating with electric wires, being hung from his hands and deprivation of food and sleep, said Al Damir, a Palestinian group upholding prisoners' rights.

On Sunday, Mr. Momeni "tried to escape by jumping from the third floor of the general intelligence building, where he was being held, and suffered a broken leg," Al Damir said in a statement received by Agence France Presse.

He made it to Ramallah hospital, where he was being held by Palestinian security forces, the group said.

Mr. Momeni has been held for questioning for the past six days, apparently for his role in receiving a videotape from the Hamas in April.

Reuters broadcast the videotape, in which a masked man claimed to be Adel Awadallah, a Hamas military leader, and accused Palestinian security officials of the Mar. 29 slaying of Hamas bombmaker Mohieddin Sharif.

Mr. Momeni was first called in for questioning by police over the tape several weeks ago, but he was released after a few hours, sources close to him said.

Mr. Momeni received the tape after an anonymous phone call told him where to find the cassette, the sources said.

Palestinian general intelligence said in a statement on Sunday that Mr. Momeni was being held for questioning

Two Palestinians killed in Lebanon

SIDON (AFP) — Two people were killed and two others injured in a shooting incident in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain Helweh in south Lebanon, Palestinian sources said Monday. A masked man fired a volley from an automatic weapon at Mahmoud Khatib on Sunday night, killing the Ain Helweh resident as he walked along the camp's main road, said the sources. Members of Khatib's family arrived on the scene shortly afterwards and opened fire, wounding three passers-by. One of the injured, a member of the camp's security organisation, died of his wounds on Monday morning, hospital sources said. Palestinian sources said they believed the motive for the shooting was personal as Khatib was not believed to be involved in political activities.

"over security issues in which he is suspected of involvement."

After Reuters broadcast the video, its Gaza City office was closed down for several days by police, who accused the office of "spreading stories damaging to Palestinian society."

Palestinian police say Sharif was killed by Mr. Awadallah's followers in a dispute within the movement over leadership, money, and strategy. Hamas denies the claims, accusing Israel of killing Sharif, possibly with a human rights group.

Human rights groups have accused the Palestinian National Authority of harassing journalists to suppress versions of Sharif's death which contradict the police claims.



Annan to attend Cannes festival opening

PARIS (AP) — Mixing politics with show biz, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan will join the glitterati at this week's opening of the 51st Cannes Film Festival, organisers said. Annan will walk up the red-carpeted steps of the festival palace with French Culture Minister Catherine Trautmann on opening night Wednesday, said a festival statement. The U.N. office in Paris confirmed Mr. Annan will attend. This year, Cannes is associating itself with the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, said the festival statement.

Cher and Bono still close through medium

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G-8 summit to discuss
Mideast peace process

PARIS (AP) — The Middle East peace process will be a major topic at the G-8 summit in Birmingham, England, this weekend, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Monday.

Blair's eight most trusted advisers will be in a meeting with British Prime Minister Blair in London on Monday. Blair said Israel's refusal to accept the 1993 Oslo Accords was a major obstacle to the peace process. He said the G-8 summit would be a good opportunity to discuss the peace process with the other seven nations in Birmingham.

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